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Security Council

Sixty-ninth year

Provisional

7109th meeting

Wednesday, 12 February 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Ms. Murmokaitė/Mrs. Kazragienė/Mr. Baublys .... (Lithuania)

Members:		
	Argentina	Mr. Oyarzábal
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Chad	Mr. Adoum
	Chile	Mr. Errázuriz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Araud
	Jordan	Mr. Hmoud
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Oh Joon
	Russian Federation	Mr. Zagaynov
	Rwanda	Mr. Nduhungirehe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2013/689)

Letter dated 3 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2014/74)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2013/689)

Letter dated 3 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2014/74)

The President: Under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, the Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine and Uruguay to participate in this meeting.

Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; and Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Ms. Pillay and Mr. Daccord, who are joining today's meeting via video teleconference from Geneva.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the Council's provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of the members of the Council to docuemnt S/2013/689, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I also wish to draw the attention of members of the Council to document S/2014/74, which contains the text of a letter dated 3 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note concerning the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to Ms. Pillay.

Ms. Pillay: I would like to thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council. I shall base my remarks on the experience gained over the past few years by my Office and the human rights components in peacekeeping operations.

Nine peacekeeping operations currently have an explicit mandate to protect civilians. My Office has worked together with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to develop policies, guidance and training on the protection of civilians, building on the wealth of often innovative approaches that have been developed in the field.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the human rights component has dispatched multidisciplinary protection teams to volatile areas. In Mali, human rights mobile teams have been deployed to areas at risk, and human rights call-centres were set up during the elections. In Afghanistan, civilian casualty monitoring has provided the basis for influential advocacy, such as the 8 February report issued jointly by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Human rights officers have also advised on United Nations military preventive deployments, contingency plans and sheltering and escorting civilians. They have also provided a critical bridge with local communities, human rights defenders and women's groups for alerts on risks of gross human rights violations. The human rights due-diligence policy has also contributed to preventing and addressing violations. All those approaches are strongly grounded in human rights functions.

Our experience confirms that timely and well-resourced human rights monitoring, advocacy and reporting are essential for the effective implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates. In South Sudan, beyond the physical protection of more than 80,000 civilians in United Nations bases, it is clear that human rights investigation, monitoring, advocacy and reporting are key concerns now more than ever. Together with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, we are preparing a comprehensive public human rights report. OHCHR is also providing technical support and advice for the establishment of a commission of inquiry by the African Union.

In the Central African Republic, while regional peacekeeping efforts are ongoing, my Office has been focusing on much-needed fact-finding, public reporting and promotion of accountability through the deployment of a rapid-response monitoring team, increased human rights capacity within the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic and support for the Council's commission of inquiry. There is an urgent need to stop the terrible violence in the Central African Republic and to hold perpetrators accountable. I also note that the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court has decided to open a preliminary investigation. I welcome the Council's continued attention to the situation in the Central African Republic, in particular its efforts to ensure accountability.

The Secretary-General's action plan entitled "Rights up front", which places human rights at the centre of the response to potential or emerging crises, is also strengthening United Nations efforts with regard both to South Sudan and the Central African Republic, including those of my Office.

In spite of those developments, I see a number of areas in which greater support from the Security Council and States would be welcome.

First, we need to be clearer about what we mean by the protection of civilians in peacekeeping. Over the years, the Council has greatly contributed to the protection of civilians by issuing fully fledged human rights mandates and mandates to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence. However, the link between those two mandates and their mutually reinforcing nature has not always been made clear. The protection of civilians in peacekeeping should be norms-based. Implementation should be firmly anchored in the broader human rights protection mandate of missions. To that effect, my Office has worked with the DPKO and the Department of Political Affairs to develop a joint policy, the aim of which is to ensure that human rights officers, military personnel and other mission components work better together to respond to the risk of human rights violations, including in situations of imminent physical violence against civilians. I urge the Council to emphasize that link when issuing mandates, and to ensure that human rights components are appropriately resourced. My Office is currently seeking to strengthen our headquarters support to those components in order to facilitate the speedy deployment of well-trained human rights experts in crisis situations.

Secondly, we need greater support for human rights access. It is indispensable for the effective protection of human rights that we establish facts and understand underlying causes and conflict dynamics. Sound and compelling human rights information and analysis must be at the core of strategies to protect civilians. Access by human rights personnel to remote and at-risk areas is also critical for deterrence. Our experience in Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo shows the value of close cooperation among human rights, military and other peacekeeping personnel to rapidly assess developments in remote locations, to engage in preventive advocacy with potential perpetrators and to protect civilians.

Thirdly, we need continued support from the Council in particularly difficult situations when protecting civilians requires bold action and swift decisions and when mission personnel are intimidated, expelled or attacked because they are doing their jobs.

Fourthly, impunity allows gross human rights violations to thrive. It undermines the fabric of societies and prevents the development of lasting solutions. States must do more to ensure that violations of international human rights and humanitarian law are investigated and that perpetrators are held accountable. In post-conflict situations, where capacity is often minimal, that requires sustained efforts. That may include mobile courts, specialized chambers, internationally supported tribunals, vetting, robust technical assistance to strengthen the criminal justice system or a combination of those elements.

I encourage the Council and States to squarely face the magnitude and responsibility of, and the resources needed for, that task, in the clear knowledge that accountability is crucial to the protection of civilians. I also call on the Council to more systematically condemn violations, to remind parties of their obligations and to demand compliance.

Finally, let us not forget that there are armed conflicts in which civilians suffer greatly but where no peacekeeping operation is deployed. I am particularly concerned about the situation in Syria, including the use of sieges as a method of warfare and their tremendous impact on the civilian population. At least 240,000 Syrians, including women and children, remain trapped and struggle to survive.

Both the Syrian Government and the anti-Government groups are failing to fulfil their obligations under international law. There must not be an assumption that those who remain in Old Homs and other besieged areas are combatants. All parties to the conflict must urgently facilitate unimpeded access to humanitarian relief.

I also reiterate my call to the Council to refer the Syrian situation to the International Criminal Court as a clear message to all parties that there will be consequences for their actions. The lack of consensus on Syria and the resulting inaction have been disastrous, and civilians have paid the price. I am appalled by the massacre on 8 February at Maan, where dozens of civilians were killed.

Throughout my mandate, I have welcomed every opportunity to brief the Council and States about human rights issues in order to contribute to informed decisions. I have seen tremendous progress in the emphasis that peacekeeping operations have given to human rights. I encourage the Council and Member States to continue putting human rights at the centre of considerations on peace and security.

The President: I thank Ms. Pillay for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Amos.

Ms. Amos: The Secretary-General's latest report (S/2013/689) on the protection of civilians takes stock of the current, very bleak state of affairs in this area of work and also provides an update on progress in responding to the five core challenges. It makes recommendations for strengthening protection, addressing new weapon technologies, explosive weapons use in populated areas, casualty recording, non-State armed groups, peacekeeping operations, humanitarian access and accountability.

In today's briefing, I will focus my remarks on the general deterioration in the protection of civilians in the past year, the impact of key developments in peacekeeping operations on the issue and the pressing need to strengthen the protection of civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

I regret to inform the Council that, despite the extensive human rights and humanitarian law that has been put in place and the widespread availability of social media, which is now used to track atrocities against civilians, civilians continue to be killed, injured and maimed in conflict by targeted or indiscriminate attacks on a regular basis. They are arbitrarily detained, tortured, raped or forcibly recruited. They are displaced to an uncertain fate, often with no or only limited access to basic necessities.

The recent examples of Syria, the Central African Republic and South Sudan bear that out, with parties to conflict failing, sometimes deliberately, to respect and protect civilians pursuant to their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law. In many respects, we seem to be going backwards as international exhortations, including from the Council, go unheeded.

In Syria, civilians have been subjected to brutal violence for almost three years, and there appears to be no end in sight. We all hope that the current talks in Geneva will deliver a positive result. As the violence intensifies and the situation on the ground becomes more complicated, people are becoming even more desperate. There are reports and allegations of the systematic targeting of communities with specific religious affiliations. And the use of siege as a weapon of war is particularly heinous — the deliberate denial of humanitarian assistance to people in desperate need. As a world community, we had all hoped that we had moved beyond that, and yet we are witnessing it in Syria every day. There are 250,000 people in areas of the country that are besieged. They cannot leave, and we cannot get aid in.

The recent and desperately needed humanitarian pause in Homs has enabled United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent workers to evacuate more than 1,000 civilians and to deliver some food and medicines to people in the Old City. It was a heroic effort, as people waiting to leave and humanitarian workers trying to get aid in were being deliberately targeted. We will learn the lessons from that operation and seek to replicate it in other parts of the country.

Atrocities continue in the Central African Republic, including against those fleeing violence. There are 100,000 people seeking refuge at the airport, and thousands have fled into the bush. The conflict is complex, and all communities are affected by the violence. I am gravely concerned by reports of reprisals against the minority Muslim community. In many towns, Muslim groups are currently isolated and threatened by anti-Balaka forces, and tens of thousands have already left the country for Chad or Cameroon. Many local religious leaders are doing all they can to bring communities together, but the trust has gone.

In South Sudan, thousands of lives were saved when the United Nations Mission in South Sudan allowed people into its bases after violence erupted on 15 December. Nearly 75,000 people are still receiving protection and assistance in eight United Nations bases, crowded together in unsustainable conditions and too fearful to return to homes and communities, which have been razed to the ground. However, the majority of the displaced, 85 per cent of them, are in open areas where access is difficult and insecure. We continue to receive reports of ongoing clashes, despite the cessation of hostilities agreement, leading to further displacements. People are exposed to physical and sexual violence, the destruction of their property, separation from their families and psychosocial trauma.

In all those situations and in many others, humanitarian workers face significant challenges as they seek to protect and assist those in need. That is often done at great personal risk, as we saw four days ago in Homs. They, too, must be protected and respected by parties to conflict. In 2013, 120 humanitarian workers were reported killed, 105 injured and 113 kidnapped.

Let me now turn to peacekeeping operations.

Mandating peacekeeping missions to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence remains among the most significant actions taken by the Council to enhance protection, and it has undoubtedly saved lives. In many countries, we are constantly asking our peacekeepers to do more, as their numbers are not necessarily commensurate with the task at hand. We have seen that in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and elsewhere. But we also recognize that the implementation of a robust protection mandate by peacekeepers can lead to tensions for missions and humanitarian actors. We have sought to address some of those challenges. But there are three specific areas where our continued engagement is essential.

First, ensuring effective coordination between missions and humanitarian actors is essential. We all know that there needs to be a clear distinction between humanitarian action and a mission's political and military objectives, so as to maintain the centrality of the principles underpinning humanitarian work. It is important that the United Nations and other humanitarian actors are, and are seen to be, neutral, impartial and independent. However, that is not always easy to achieve in volatile, fast-moving conflict situations, where communities look to the United Nations for protection but their leaders cite the partiality of the United Nations in support of one side or another, thereby increasing risks to humanitarian workers and limiting their access to people in need.

Secondly, many of the tasks undertaken by peacekeepers to protect civilians rely on their impartiality. But peacekeepers are also sometimes expected to use force. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has peacekeeping and peace-enforcement troops under the same command. It may be the only way in which they can protect civilians, but we must remain mindful that, if that impartiality is called into question — in particular if the mission is perceived to have become a party to the conflict — its close proximity to civilians, including in pursuit of its protection activities, could place civilians at increased risk of attack at the same time.

Thirdly, it is important that the civilian contribution to implementing the protection mandate is not overshadowed by a focus on the military role and the physical protection of civilians. The work of human rights, the protection of women and children and security-sector reform staff is just as essential for ensuring protection in the long term. Along with the protection cluster, their work also helps to guide the military component in its approach to the protection of civilians.

Let me now turn to the protection of civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. As is apparent in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, we must do more in that area. According to the British non-governmental organization Action on Armed Violence, almost 38,000 people were killed or injured by explosive weapons worldwide in 2012. Of those, 78 per cent were civilians. When explosive weapons were used in populated areas, 91 per cent of casualties were civilians. Last week, the United

Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan reported a 14 per cent increase in civilian casualties in 2013, as compared to the previous year. The indiscriminate use of improvised explosive devices by anti-Government elements increased in 2013 and remained the leading cause of civilian casualties.

In addition to being killed or injured, civilians are also displaced, often for long periods and in precarious conditions. In Syria, 6.5 million people are internally displaced, and 2.5 million have fled the country. Many of those displaced have fled fighting characterized by the devastating and continuing use of explosive weapons in populated areas — all despite the Council's calls for the removal of heavy weapons from population centres.

In the Sudanese states of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, aerial bombardment of civilian areas by Sudanese forces and shelling both by Sudanese forces and by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North continue to result in death, injury and displacement.

Explosive weapons can result in horrific injuries requiring emergency and specialist medical treatment, rehabilitation and psychosocial support services. But often that treatment and support is unavailable, in part because health facilities have been damaged or destroyed. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), from which the Council will hear later, reports that explosive weapons are the leading cause of damage to health-care facilities in armed conflicts.

Explosive-weapon use in populated areas results in damage to, or the destruction of, housing and other infrastructure, such as schools. Approximately one third of the housing stock in Syria has been destroyed by the fighting, while nearly one fifth of the schools are either damaged or being used as shelters.

Livelihoods are also devastated as land and other means of production are rendered unusable as the result of explosive remnants of war, which will continue to pose a threat to civilians until they are removed. Damage to the agricultural sector during hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza from 14 to 21 November 2012 is estimated at $20 million. Moreover, explosive remnants of war remain buried in farmland and in the rubble of damaged buildings, posing a threat to people and those working on rubble-removal and reconstruction.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly called on parties to conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. He has asked the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to continue working with Member States, United Nations colleagues, the ICRC and civil society to strengthen the protection of civilians against such weapons. We will work to promote Member States' recognition of the humanitarian impact of explosive-weapon use in populated areas and their commitment to avoid or limit such use in the future, including by building on good practice in that area. I hope that all Member States will engage in those efforts.

While our humanitarian and peacekeeping work saves lives and can enhance the safety and security of people affected by conflict, it remains the primary responsibility of the parties to conflict to respect and protect civilians and spare them from the effects of hostilities.

Until such time as parties act accordingly, and until such time as they are persuaded or coerced into complying with the law — including by the Council — or held accountable for their failures, the lack of sustained protection for civilians will continue to give little cause for optimism, but considerable cause for despair, outrage and shame.

The President: I thank Ms. Amos for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ladsous.

Mr. Ladsous (*spoke in French*): In two months, we will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, an event that was horrible beyond words, devastating a nation, a region and the world's collective conscience. But that tragedy also contributed to shaping the United Nations and the international community.

Today's debate is evidence of both how much has changed and how much remains unchanged. Perhaps never before in history have world leaders directed such focused attention on the protection of the defenceless. Yet, all too often, we continue to see civilians' rights violated during conflict. From South Sudan to Syria to the Central African Republic, countless men, women and children are caught in the crossfire, displaced by conflict and even targeted because of their religion, political affiliation or ethnicity.

But it must be acknowledged that lessons have been learned from past experiences, and that nowhere are they more evident than in the field of peacekeeping. Today, it must be emphasized that no less than 95 per cent of peacekeepers work in missions mandated by the Security Council specifically to protect civilians. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has worked diligently to clarify operational guidelines in that important area, which forms the core of many mandates — nine, to be precise.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, peacekeepers have utilized a clear and robust mandate to respond to the perpetrators of attacks on civilians. In that respect, I believe that the November incident involving the surrender of the Mouvement du 23 mars testifies to the effectiveness of such work.

Over the years, the Department has made a determined effort to develop a consistent operational concept on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping, based on a comprehensive, holistic approach and drawing on the full range of the possible activities of a United Nations mission aimed at enhancing protection. The Council's clear intent and, importantly, the consensus of troop- and police-contributing countries together are of major importance. Protection crises are never times for doubt. In my opinion, it is crucial, in terms of daily operations, that the expectations agreed to by all actors be expressed as precisely as possible.

Last month, the Council faced a very grave decision when violence erupted in South Sudan. I believe that the Council took decisive action, increasing the troop strength of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan by authorizing significant reinforcements. The Mission has met the challenge, providing what I consider to be unprecedented protection and opening its doors to increasing numbers of displaced persons, amounting now to 85,000 civilians.

Yet it must be acknowledged that, despite burdening the Mission's human and material resources, hundreds of thousands of other South Sudanese remain at risk. Clearly, our soldiers cannot impose peace upon the parties to that conflict, and resolving protection challenges ultimately requires political solutions. Peacekeeping is fundamentally a part of those political solutions.

Today, virtually all of our missions not only incorporate civilian expertise in political affairs, human rights, the rule of law, along with, of course, military and police officers, but many are also integrated with our humanitarian partners. In Mali, our peacekeepers are supporting a delicate political process aimed at establishing an inclusive Government. In Haiti, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, our peacekeeping missions are supporting and strengthening the respective Governments' capacities to assume their protection responsibilities.

(*spoke in English*)

Supporting host Governments in meeting those protection responsibilities lies at the heart of modern peacekeeping. It is therefore no coincidence that the human rights due-diligence policy grew out of the work of peacekeepers and, more specifically, their work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo several years back. While our troops may need to stand against rogue Government elements in order to protect civilians, peacekeeping is viable, ultimately, only with the consent of the host Government. The protection of civilians by United Nations peacekeepers should therefore never be confused with non-consensual intervention under the third pillar of the responsibility-to-protect framework.

With the increasing complexity of the situation in the field, peacekeepers are vital actors in improving the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and they play a central role in the Secretary-General's "Rights up front" framework. They support accountability for human rights violations and promote compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law. Peacekeepers are also important in many places for the facilitation of humanitarian assistance while also respecting humanitarian space.

Where applicable, our missions have developed comprehensive strategies for the protection of civilians. Those strategies draw together all mission components in a concerted effort focused on the most critical threats to civilians. They provide for dedicated organizational and leadership structures to facilitate early warning and joint operational response.

The limits of peacekeeping are real. Within their capabilities, missions must do their utmost to protect but, beyond those limits, other means must be found. No peacekeeping mission can physically protect all, or even most, civilians where a serious conflict has broken out. Of couse, often our missions are judged by journalists who are seeking headlines or by analysts who emphasize too strongly the use of force. Therefore, the Council has an important role to play in articulating its expectations for the protective capacities of peacekeepers — expectations that will form the basis for clear standards for action. Ultimately, civilians will be fully protected only when there is sufficient peace and there are sufficiently stable national structures to sustain and protect it. That must be the overall goal.

Today, we also face a world that, in many respects, is more dangerous than it was in 1994. United Nations personnel now face threats that were unheard of 20 years ago. Recently, in Afghanistan, the United Nations family lost four of its members in a senseless attack on a Kabul restaurant. In Mali, our peacekeepers face the possibility of terrorist groups that are willing and able and actually want to target Blue Helmets. That makes the job of protecting civilians an extremely challenging task.

In navigating those new environments, we must be more flexible — learning and adapting as an Organization. Exploring new capabilities and adopting new technologies will not be an optional matter in the future of peacekeeping. We must improve our capacities for early warning and rapid reaction, in which gathering, analysing and acting on information will be vital.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the Council for approving the use of unarmed, unmanned aerial systems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the consent of the Government. Clearly, that is already making a difference on the ground.

Now, do not mistake my point. Much has been put into place, but we still continue to face challenges, and we have a great deal farther to go. In too many places throughout the world, civilians suffer in conflict. That situation, whether in countries with peacekeeping missions or without, is a vital issue that requires the Council's continued attention.

Peacekeeping is an expression of the will of the Security Council and, let me say again, of troop- and police-contributing countries. Its success depends upon clear, decisive and resolute direction from the Council. It depends upon the commitment of all those who take part in peacekeeping to fully implement the mandate and the provision of sufficient capabilities and resources to effectively confront the challenges on the ground.

Peacekeeping was born when the Council sought to hold combatants apart. Let us confirm its continued vitality through our permanently reaffirmed determination to protect civilians from violence.

The President: I thank Mr. Ladsous for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Daccord.

Mr. Daccord: I am pleased and honoured to brief the Security Council today on a topic that is very central to my organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). On behalf of the ICRC, I would also like to thank Lithuania for the invitation to participate in this meeting.

As we meet today and debate the problems and, I hope, possible solutions as to how better to protect civilians caught up in armed conflict, no amount of words alone will adequately convey the scale and depth of suffering of many of those civilians — nor, in all honesty, will our words offer a way to end it.

In some of the diverse armed conflicts or other situations of violence in which the ICRC is currently working around the world — and here we are thinking especially of parts of the Middle East and Africa — the humanitarian impact of that violence on entire populations within, but also beyond, national borders is so overwhelming that it almost defies description. When almost every man, woman and child in a particular country has been directly or indirectly affected by violence, the need for decisive actions rather than just words really does become a matter of life or death.

While the search for political solutions to a number of seemingly intractable conflicts continues, it is the role of humanitarian organizations such as the ICRC to help alleviate the consequences of the fighting rather than to question its causes. Yet that role is becoming increasingly difficult to fulfil in many of today's most complex and violent crises.

There are various reasons for that. The overt politicization of aid and the polarization of States around humanitarian issues are just two reasons, reinforcing the need to clearly distinguish and separate principled humanitarian action from other aid initiatives. The widening gap between humanitarian needs and the ability to deliver an effective response is another reason, as is the decreasing proximity of many humanitarian actors to the people whom they are trying to help. Parties to armed conflicts, including complex webs of armed groups that in many cases do not respect or accept impartial humanitarian actions, present another challenge, as do the ever-present security risks. Administrative hurdles and unjustified or arbitrary restrictions and delays often add to the problems.

All of those challenges are present in the single most pressing issue facing the ICRC in many contexts, which is to gain greater humanitarian access to people directly affected by violence, to be close to them and to be able to address their needs. Therefore, the protection granted to civilians under international humanitarian law lies at the heart of the ICRC's mandate and mission, and provides a framework for our assistance activities.

The issue of humanitarian access can be extremely contentious, as ongoing debates at the highest political levels have shown. For the ICRC, however, the issue is quite clear: humanitarian access in situations of armed conflict is regulated by international humanitarian law, the rules of which must be respected by all parties to a conflict, both State and non-State. Those rules unambiguously specify that States and other parties to a conflict have the primary responsibility for the safety and well-being of populations in territories under their control. Where the basic needs of the population affected by the armed conflict are not met for whatever reason, the parties must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, although the parties retain a right of control. That means that the offer of humanitarian services by a neutral, impartial and independent organization such as the International Committee of the Red Cross cannot be interpreted as a challenge to a State's sovereignty, nor as recognition or support to any party to the conflict, and the offer cannot be refused on that basis.

We therefore take this opportunity to reiterate the ICRC's appeal to all State and non-State parties to even the most violent armed conflicts today: respect the provisions of international humanitarian law, including those related to humanitarian access. The survival of countless vulnerable people may depend upon it.

It is of course the general lack of compliance with international humanitarian law by States and non-State armed groups that presents the most critical challenge to the protection of civilians, and that is at the root of the widespread suffering we are witnessing in various situations of conflict today. For my organization, the ICRC, it is a critical aspect of our approach to engage with all parties to a conflict, including non-State armed groups, to remind them of their obligations under international humanitarian law and urge them to comply.

Of course, the ICRC's approach is only one among an increasing number of actors — both civilian and military — aiming for the protection of civilians with different mandates and ways of working. The United Nations has gone a long way in recent years in further integrating the issue of the protection of civilians into its structural framework. The ICRC is committed to maintaining and further developing its highly constructive dialogue with the United Nations on operational and legal issues related to peacekeeping and to lending its support and expertise in humanitarian law for the training of United Nations peacekeepers, both predeployment and on-site. Professional standards in protection work are of the utmost importance, and in 2013 the ICRC published an updated guide on the issue. Those standards could be used to inform the development and implementation of civilian protection strategies by United Nations peacekeeping missions.

In our daily work, the ICRC and United Nations peacekeepers are confronted with the consequences of the prevailing lack of compliance with international humanitarian law. One of the most widespread and daunting humanitarian problems arising from violations of that law — at least in terms of numbers — is that of internal displacement. That problem not only affects the many millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) themselves, but also countless host families and resident communities.

Better respect for international humanitarian law is key to preventing that problem in the first place and to protecting people who have been displaced and easing their suffering. Humanitarian law, for example, prohibits the displacement of people unless it is necessary for imperative military reasons or for the protection of the civilians themselves. If there were better respect for the rules prohibiting direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects and for those prohibiting indiscriminate means and methods of warfare, to take another example, fewer people would be compelled to flee their homes.

During displacement, IDPs are often exposed to further abuses and have wide-ranging subsistence needs. Conversely, but equally reprehensible, people are sometimes forcibly prevented from fleeing when they wish to do so. In both situations, it is crucial that parties to the conflict allow and facilitate humanitarian access so that the needs of affected people may be addressed in an impartial manner.

In many armed conflicts, the prevalent use of explosive weapons with wide impact in densely populated areas — with all its inherent risk of incidental or indiscriminate death, injury and destruction of homes and vital civilian infrastructure — further fuels displacement and inhibits return. The ICRC joins the Secretary-General in encouraging States to share information on their respective polices, operational practices and lessons learned on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. That would contribute to informed discussions on this important humanitarian issue, and hopefully to the development of operational guidance by States.

Compliance with international humanitarian law provides protection during armed conflict and after the fighting has ended. Yet we watch in dismay as parties to conflict continue to disregard the very rules that could lay the groundwork for recovery and an eventual return to stability. Fanning the flames of ethnic, religious and sectarian hatred and violence further exacerbates the problem, increasing the perennial instability and fragility of many conflict-affected States.

All of us here today have a role to play in improving compliance with international humanitarian law. For our part, the joint Swiss-ICRC initiative to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law, which continues to gain momentum and widespread support from States, is just one example in that regard.

Ultimately, it is up to States and non-State armed groups, which are also bound by the provisions of international humanitarian law, to show the political will to translate legal provisions into actual deeds, to turn words and promises into concrete actions and to make the protection of civilians a meaningful reality.

The President: I thank Mr. Daccord for his briefing.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank the Council members for their valuable contributions to the statement. In accordance with the understanding reached among members, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statemen., which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2014/3.

It is so decided.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I thank you, Madam President, for holding this important debate today. I also thank High Commissioner Pillay, Under-Secretary General Amos, Under-Secretary-General Ladsous and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Director-General Daccord for their compelling and thoughtful contributions to this debate. The specific examples they have used are sobering and underline the importance of the subject that is before us now.

Fifteen years ago, the Security Council formally committed for the first time to protect civilians in armed conflict when it adopted resolution 1265 (1999). In the wake of mass atrocities in Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was increasingly clear that the international community could no longer stand by and witness the massacre of innocent people. Yet, as we move towards the twentieth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, we continue to bear witness to the most brutal violations of human rights in conflictt, from Syria and South Sudan to the Central African Republic. It is vital that we step up our efforts to prevent and respond to such atrocities.

Before I move on to the topic of today's debate, I want to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2013/689) and to reiterate our full endorsement of United Nations efforts to enhance its role in safeguarding human rights around the world through the action plan entitled "Rights up front". Our objective today is to establish and underline broad support for the United Nations key role of protecting civilians. I think that is why so many are here today to listen to and to participate in the debate.

Politics and protecting civilians should not be mixed: protecting civilians transcends politics. Sovereignty matters, but so too do the global norms that underpin the protection that we are seeking to uphold. Yves Daccord reminded us just now of how essential that is for organizations such as the ICRC, and in particular for the individuals that they serve.

We are pleased that the presidential statement just adopted today (S/PRST/2014/3) reiterates some of the most basic principles and commitments that have been made over the years by the Security Council on the agenda item, including through the attached aide-mémoire (S/PRST/2010/25, annex). The aide-mémoire has been painstakingly compiled from existing and agreed Council texts. It establishes the clear baseline against which we operate and, as

Mr. Hervé Ladsous has reminded us, clarity is vital for those who operate in dangerous situations in the field.

Yesterday, the Security Council heard from Ms. Valerie Amos about the humanitarian challenges faced in the crisis in South Sudan. Today, she has set out clearly the huge difficulties being faced in Syria and the Central African Republic. Tomorrow, she will brief the Council on Syria. We believe that the Council can and must play a key role in alleviating the impact on civilians in such crises. That is why we strongly support agreement on a humanitarian draft resolution on Syria to improve the lives of the Syrian people, who are bearing the burden of the violence in their country. There can be no justification for any country standing in the way of a resolution that is designed to allow civilians access to food and medical assistance.

Early action to prevent conflict and mass human rights abuses remains vital. That must start long before peacekeepers may be required. Once peacekeeping missions are deployed, their protection mandates are a fundamental part of the ability of the United Nations to protect civilians in conflict. Those mandates must be fully implemented. Priority should be given to the protection of civilians in mission planning assessments and the allocation of resources and in activities on the ground. We encourage all mandated missions to develop protection strategies and to use all the assets of the mission to achieve that task. We urge mission leadership to establish effective coordination mechanisms so as to include all the relevant departments that enhance data collection and analysis and that improve early warning and rapid response. From the police and the military to civilian personnel, where a misison is mandated to protect, that should be at the centre of their daily work.

We welcome the positive steps taken by missions, as outlined in the concept paper (S/2014/74, annex), and encourage a greater sharing of best practices among them. Regular opportunities to analyse strengths and weaknesses are also important and more information should be shared with the Council in country reports and briefings in order to highlight the challenges that missions face every day. As Ms. Navi Pillay urged, we welcome the effective use of the human rights due diligence policy so as to hold perpetrators accountable, including by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo following the horrific Monova rapes in 2012. We urge more consistent application of that policy elsewhere.

The United Kingdom commends the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) for opening its doors to tens of thousands of South Sudanese civilians fleeing the eruption of brutal violence in September. I think that that is something of that the Council really needs to take note of. The actions of UNMISS saved people's lives, and the Mission continues to work hard with humanitarian actors to protect the 75,000 people sheltering on its bases. We will continue to support the Mission as it seeks to protect civilians more widely, including through monitoring and reporting on human rights violations and abuses and backing the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The planning, allocation and effective use of resources are vital. The United Kingdom provides extrabudgetary funds to the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations for the Protection of Civilians Coordination Unit and the development of predeployment training modules on conflict-related sexual violence for the military, the police and civilians. We encourage all Member States to consider providing similar support.

The protection of civilians is among the Council's foremost responsibilities. Just as peacekeepers must consider the protection of civilians in every aspect of their work, so must we. Mr. Ladsous rightly reminded us of the limits of peacekeeping, as well as its great strengths. It is therefore essential that we assume our responsibilities and use the Council's authority to ensure that States shoulder their primary responsibility to prevent conflict, minimize suffering and ensure that the cycles of conflict and pain are not repeated.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I thank you, Madam President, for having convened this debate. I also thank High Commissioner Pillay, Under-Secretary-General Amos, Under-Secretary-General Ladsous and Director-General Daccord for their exemplary leadership on protection matters.

As the Secretary-General assessed in his most recent report on the protection of civilians (S/2013/689), the current state of the protection of civilians leaves little room for optimism. The messages delivered by our briefers make such bleakness plain. We have heard, in the words of Under-Secretary-General Amos, about reactions of outrage, despair and shame.

We know that protecting civilians is at the heart of what the Council does and peacekeeping is one of the primary means at the Council's disposal to do it. The standing and authority of the United Nations depend decisively upon the capacity of its peacekeepers to protect civilians effectively.

We all know that today's peacekeeping missions are highly diverse and complex, not least stemming from the fact that most of those missions are mandated explicitly to protect civilians. Resolutions 1894 (2009) and 2086 (2013) reinforce the normative framework on protection and peacekeeping but, as always, the real test remains to ensure that the existing norms are implemented on the ground. I carefully note all our briefers' comments in that regard this morning.

In the past year, the Council has taken serious decisions to equip peacekeeping missions with robust protection mandates. We are seeing the positive impact of such mandates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali. There will always be limits to what peacekeepers can do, but we must continue to evaluate the effectiveness of those mandates and compile the lessons learned to establish best practice.

Instrumental in that effort is ensuring, as Under-Secretary-General Ladsous has reminded us, that the peacekeeping partnership — the Council, the Secretariat and the troop- and police-contributing countries — share a common understanding of protection challenges. Regular briefings by United Nations force commanders allow the Council to hear the perspectives of those responsible in the field for delivering on those mandates. We strongly support United Nations police commissioners briefing the Council in the same way.

The Council should consider upgrading the status of its informal expert group on the protection of civilians. That would help to build consensus about protection challenges, allowing the Council to take appropriate actions to enhance protection in a timely way.

We must be prepared to react nimbly, as necessary and without hesitation, to protect civilians when situations change quickly, as is the case in South Sudan. Nine hundred thousand civilians have fled their homes, 75,000 of whom are sheltering in United Nations camps. Resolution 2132 (2013) authorized an increase in the military and police capacities, effectively using inter-mission cooperation. However, we will have to consider carefully the future mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, with the protection of civilians our paramount consideration. Resourcing should not be allowed to stand in the way.

If peacekeepers are to effectively protect civilians, they must have appropriate training, equipment and critical enablers. The proliferation of weapons also affects the ability of peacekeepers to provide security for themselves and for civilians. We encourage further support so as to assist peacekeepers in tracking and managing illicit weapons flows and in implementing arms embargoes, as resolution 2117 (2013), adopted last September, requires.

We should be prepared to encourage greater use of technologies that enhance the capability of peacekeeping missions to perform increasingly complex tasks. Unarmed unmanned aerial vehicles will enhance early warning on threats to civilians, deter armed groups and bolster the safety of personnel. The sooner they are rolled out right across missions the better.

Ultimately, the best way in which the Council can protect civilians is to prevent armed conflict itself in the first instance. As the Council, we must sharpen our ability to anticipate and to respond to emerging crises affecting civilians. Regular horizon-scanning briefings are one means to that end.

We welcome the Secretary-General's "Rights up front" initiative, which identifies concrete action to improve the United Nations response to future crises. Protection is at the core of that initiative, and we need to ensure that all parts of the United Nations system implement it both systematically and organically.

The primary responsibility to protect civilians rests with all the parties to a conflict. That requires full adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law. Those responsible for committing serious violations must be held to account, preferably at the national level but, if not, the International Criminal Court may have a role to play. Our design of peacekeeping missions should reflect that need for accountability.

The daily horror of Syria reminds us that the international community and the Council must condemn the denial of humanitarian access, in all its forms, as a weapon of war, and must do all we can to ensure rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to meet the needs of civilians. The Council needs to act through a resolution on this now. That is why Luxembourg, Jordan and Australia have prepared one.

Ultimately, the international community has a responsibility to protect populations if States will not, or cannot, fulfil their obligations to prevent mass atrocity crimes. That is a responsibility that the Council needs to uphold.

To conclude, the presidential statement we have adopted today (S/PRST/2014/3) necessarily reaffirms the need for the Council and Member States to strengthen further protection for the many millions of civilians who desperately need help. The update of the aide-mémoire pertaining to the protection of civilians, which is annexed to the presidential statement and was initially adopted by the Council in 2002, remains essential guidance for the Council's future work. As we have agreed today, we must use it on a more systematic and consistent basis as we further develop and, crucially, implement our decisive and permanent task of protecting civilians.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): Thank you, Madam President, for proposing the present debate on the protection of civilians during United Nations peacekeeping operations. I also wish to thank High Commissioner Pillay, Under-Secretaries-General Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General Amos, and Director-General Daccord for their briefings and, in particular, for singling out the impact of the horrific conflicts that confront us and the challenge we face to protect civilians. I also thank them for their tireless efforts for international peace, security and human rights.

We are all aware that armed conflicts today are rarely fought between opposing military forces lined up against each other on an isolated battlefield. Instead, they tend to involve on one side, or perhaps both, irregular forces that live in close proximity to civilian populations. The result is that, when fighting takes place, civilians are often at grave risk, either because they are intentionally targeted or because they otherwise find themselves in the line of fire. Even when civilians do survive, the conflict may quickly drive them from their homes, exposing them to a new set of risks.

The responsibility for protecting civilians in conflict therefore is both an important and highly complicated one — a job we are still learning how to do effectively. In recent years, the Council has regularly directed United Nations peace missions to protect civilians under imminent threat. Establishing a mandate, however, is a profoundly simple task as compared to fulfilling one. The challenge we face goes beyond establishing goals to actually saving the securing the lives of civilians in conflict. That challenge can be broken down into three core elements, namely, prioritization, planning and prevention.

The first of those elements is straightforward. The protection of civilians must be identified as a key priority in any peacekeeping mission from the very earliest stages. No one is helped, and the credibility of the United Nations is seriously damaged, when United Nations troops stand by while civilians are wounded or killed.

The second imperative is planning — a process that should begin as soon as the evidence of a potential crisis comes to the Council's attention. The best way to protect civilians is to act in time to keep conflicts from breaking out. With effective and early planning, peacekeeping missions can be designed with civilian protection uppermost in mind — with the right equipment and the best mix of military, police and civilian personnel prepositioned to respond to potential crises.

Part of planning is to learn from the past, while acknowledging that no two situations are exactly alike. In Haiti, civilian protection has centred on efforts to return displaced families to their homes and train an effective national police. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we are finally seeing the benefits of a Mission that has emphasized civilian protection and that is backed by a strong political and diplomatic strategy. It is worth noting in this context that the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has developed a comprehensive plan for protecting civilians, which includes mapping specific threats and integrating that information into overall planning. Making such data available to mission commanders can spell the difference between success and failure.

All elements of the United Nations hierarchy have a role to play in planning for civilian protection. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) can facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices across missions, thereby helping to disseminate lessons learned. But mission-specific planning remains critical, and DPKO has a duty to assist each mission in developing a plan that fits the unique circumstances it will face. Meanwhile, the members of the Council have a responsibility, through the questions we ask and the wording of the resolutions we adopt, to make clear the importance we attach to this issue.

That brings me to the third element in our discussion today: prevention. While we can make civilian protection a priority and devote ample resources to planning, we can still find ourselves trying to save lives in ways that were not foreseen. In Côte d'Ivoire in 2010, the political crisis required rapid adjustments to enable a democratic transition and contain civilian violence. Just recently in South Sudan, United Nations Mission outposts served as emergency gathering points for more than 80,000 internally displaced persons. Inside those overcrowded compounds, desperate families received security, food, water and health care. Babies were born, children studied and the sick and wounded were treated.

Nothing is more predictable in international peacekeeping that the likelihood that unpredictable events will occur. The greater the flexibility we build into our preparations and deployments, the better off we will be. We have made progress but we can do more — to preposition equipment and to consider in advance how we might transport peacekeepers to remote locations with relatively little notice and shift resources from one area to another. And we must do the best job we can in integrating information about changing political dynamics into our peacekeeping strategies. We cannot do everything, but we can at least act with wisdom and determination in response to what we have learned.

We should also continue to explore the promise of new technology. The deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been useful in identifying hostile troop movements and locating civilian populations in need, helping better protect civilians and peacekeepers. Early-warning networks should be part of any plan for protecting civilians, and the United Nations should strive to be connected where appropriate to all such networks.

The protection of civilians is an integral part of the United Nations peacekeeping mission and must therefore be made a top priority in the planning we do, the preparations we make and the operations we implement on the ground. We must keep learning and continually review our efforts to identify what we should be doing better. Within the United Nations, the DPKO Best Practices Unit is driving that effort. We all have a responsibility to do our part, as United Nations officials, Security Council members, troop-contributing nations and members of the world community. Our credibility is at stake, but, far more important, so are the lives of our neighbours.

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank the Lithuanian presidency for the initiative to return to the question of the protection of civilians during armed conflict. We are grateful to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Under-Secretaries-General for Humanitarian Affairs and for Peacekeeping Operations and the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross for their comprehensive briefings.

Despite steps taken by the international community, the situation with regard to the protection of civilians in times of armed conflict leaves much to be desired. From Afghanistan, Syria and other theatres of armed conflict throughout the world, reports continue to arrive of civilian casualties. Naturally, we condemn deliberate attacks on civilians as well as civilian deaths as a result of indiscriminate or disproportionate use of force. We would highlight in particular the very topical problem of civilian casualties resulting from the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones.

There is no doubt that the protection of civilians is a priority for all parties to a conflict. An important role here is played by peacekeepers, whose mandates increasingly include such functions. However, we do not agree that peacekeeping should be viewed exclusively in terms of the protection of civilians and facilitating the provision of humanitarian assistance, notwithstanding the importance of those tasks. The priorities of peacekeepers are the establishment and the maintenance of peace, the facilitation of political processes and ensuring security in countries of deployment.

We view the protection of civilians as an important, but not the only task often assigned to peacekeeping operations. We believe that the modalities for the practical implementation thereof should be tied to specific mandates defined by the Security Council for each country situation.

The modalities assigned to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) might not work in a different situation; they might even do harm. In United Nations practice, there have been cases, for instance in Côte d'Ivoire in 2010, where peacekeepers, in breach of their mandate and the main principles of peacekeeping, rendered support to one of the parties to a conflict and were therefore dragged into that conflict. That led to an intense armed-conflict phase with well-known serious repercussions.

On the other hand, there are other examples. Although the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has a very robust mandate on the protection of civilians, it fell well short of accomplishing the tasks assigned to it. In that regard, we believe that we should be very cautious when adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to the protection of civilians. We believe that the critically important benchmarks in this sphere should be the Charter of the United Nations and the core principles of United Nations peacekeeping: consent by the host country, neutrality and the use of force strictly in line with the mandate.

Of course, operational mandates must be clear, realistic and situation-appropriate, and each peacekeeping operation should have a clear political goal, stabilization strategy and command and should be endowed with the requisite strength and wherewithal, including police and civilian components. Protection-of-civilians tasks should be carried out in a rational manner.

It is not enough today to just put on paper powers for the protection of civilians. It is high time to instil among personnel an understanding of the standards of international humanitarian law. To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the work of peacekeeping operations, what is necessary is a clear division of roles among their components so as to prevent any duplication in their activities. A priority is also forging constructive daily contact between peacekeepers and the relevant local authorities, who bear direct responsibility for the protection of their own populations.

We believe that we should focus primarily on assisting national Governments in this area. What is important in this regard is to work to prevent and avert conflicts as well as the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants. It is important that efforts in this area be duly coordinated. Nor should we forget that the protection-of-civilians component in peacekeeping operations should not supplant functions for the maintenance of public order and ensuring the security of the population, which is the responsibility of States.

Actions to protect civilians must be based on a clear Security Council mandate which, in turn, should unswervingly be complied with by those who assume responsibility for such tasks. We condemn any action taken under the guise of the protection of civilians that in practice pursues far-reaching geopolitical goals.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank Lithuania for having convened this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict at the beginning of 2014, which will mark the fifteenth anniversary of the Security Council's commitment in the area of the protection of civilians since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999). I should like also to thank the four briefers for their statements, which highlighted the challenges that remain despite the progress that we have made since 1999. Those challenges are clearly summed up in the presidential statement we have just adopted (S/PRST/2014/3), whose annex contains the updated aide-mémoire on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, to which I wish to draw everyone's attention.

Luxembourg fully endorses the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union.

Madam President, your concept note (S/2014/74, annex) invites us to focus on the protection of civilians in the framework of United Nations missions, particularly peacekeeping missions. I would like in so doing to highlight certain operations that we deem particularly relevant in that regard.

I would like to welcome the decisive action taken by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the help of the Intervention Brigade established within that Mission, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since the adoption of resolution 2098 (2013), thanks to the Blue Helmets, the protection of civilians in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo against armed groups, primarily the Mouvement du 23 mars, has been significantly strengthened. I should like also to pay tribute to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), which is currently protecting tens of thousands of civilians who have fled the violence and who are being sheltered in protection areas for civilians set up within various UNMISS bases throughout the country.

The example of UNMISS also shows just how difficult it is for a peacekeeping mission to fully exercise its mandate to protect civilians when it does not have the required capacity, be it in terms of aerial capacity or in terms of intelligence and surveillance, which would enable it to strengthen early-warning systems. In general, we believe that means such as surveillance drones, which have been used for the first time in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, could have a positive impact in terms of preventing conflict and protecting civilians in other areas of operation.

In Mali, during our recent visit as members of the Security Council, we rightly encouraged the full deployment, as soon as possible, of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). MINUSMA has a clear mandate for the protection of civilians pursuant to resolution 2100 (2013). The kidnapping on 8 February of an International Committee of the Red Cross team between Kidal and Gao shows just how precarious the situation remains in the north of Mali. That act, which we condemn in the most robust terms, also makes clear the need to address the five core challenges addressed in the report of the Secretary-General to improve the protection of civilians. What is at stake here is ensuring that the rules of international humanitarian law are respected by non-State armed groups.

Peacekeeping operations are without a doubt the best tool that the Security Council has available to it to protect civilians in time of armed conflict. But what happens when the United Nations has not yet deployed such a mission?

I shall refer now to the cases of the Central African Republic and Syria. Civilians are the main victims of the massacres and violence that continue to be committed in the Central African Republic. In the light of that situation, the Security Council has identified the fight against impunity as a way to ensure the protection of civilians and to deter those involved from carrying out such atrocities. In this context, we welcome the establishment by the Secretary-General of an international commission of inquiry that should soon begin its work, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2127 (2013).

In that same resolution, the Security Council gave a mandate to the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA) to protect civilians, and it authorized French forces from Operation Sangaris to support MISCA in the implementation of that mandate. To strengthen international support for MISCA, the European Union has just decided to establish a time-bound military operation, the heart of whose mandate will be the protection of civilians in the area around Bangui.

The situation in the Central African Republic challenges us all; we must come together in support of that ravaged country and its people — all of its people. It is there that the "Rights up front" action plan, launched by the Secretary-General at the end of 2013, takes on its full significance.

The Syrian conflict illustrates in probably the most cruel way the impact of armed conflict on the civilian population. While the talks in Geneva are making no headway, it is difficult to envision the day when the fighting will cease and where the conditions are met for the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping mission in Syria. To protect civilians trapped in the war, the Council has sought to appeal to the parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law. That was the whole point of the presidential statement adopted on 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15), which aimed in particular at improving humanitarian access to populations affected by the Syrian crisis.

More than four months later, it is clear that that statement has not been respected by the parties to the conflict, primarily the Syrian authorities. For that reason, Australia, Jordan and Luxembourg took the initiative yesterday to present a draft resolution calling on the parties to the Syrian conflict to fully implement the provisions of the 2 October 2013 presidential statement and stop their violations of international humanitarian law, such as the use of siege and starvation as weapons of war against civilians. While the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, while violations and abuses against civilians continue, it is important that the Council take action.

As we mark the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers, I cannot conclude without emphasizing once again the importance of the protection of children in armed conflict. Children continue to be enlisted for war and are the first victims in Syria, but also in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and other crisis situations. We must do make every effort to combat this scourge and to put an end to it once and for all.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates the Lithuanian initiative to hold an open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I wish to thank the High Commissioner for Human Rights Pillay, Under-Secretary-General Ladsous and Under-Secretary-General Amos for their briefings. China also listened carefully to the statement made by the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

This year marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In the past 15 years, the Security Council has adopted multiple resolutions and presidential statements and laid down the legal framework for strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Protecting civilians has become one of the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

As the nature and characteristics of conflicts evolve over time, civilians of some countries and regions continue to suffer from the impact of armed conflict. The protection of civilians remains an arduous task for the international community. China supports holding in-depth discussions in the Security Council on the challenges faced in the protection of civilians in armed conflict and making pragmatic and effective efforts to achieve constructive results to that end. I should like to focus on the following four points.

First, all parties in an armed conflict must comply with their obligation to protect civilians. The primary responsibility in protecting innocent civilians from the harm of conflict and wars lies with national Governments. At the same time, other parties involved in a conflict must also fully comply with international humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council resolutions and spare no efforts in protecting civilians. The assistance provided by the international community and external organizations must be in line with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries concerned. In addressing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, the first priority should be given to the role of national judicial institutions, which are the main channels in that field.

Secondly, in strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflict, it is necessary to start from preventing and resolving conflicts and address the root causes so as to ease the suffering that armed conflicts inflict on civilians. The protection of civilians must be a part of the political process in the resolution of conflicts. Advancing political dialogue, reconciliation processes, strengthening security sectors, economic recovery and social development are comprehensive means for creating an environment of durable peace. The Security Council must make vigorous efforts in preventive diplomacy to prevent and contain the escalation of conflict and promote political solutions so as to achieve lasting peace as soon as possible and reduce the impact of conflicts on civilians.

Thirdly, in the protection of civilians, peacekeeping operations must strictly comply with Security Council mandates, respect the sovereignty of the countries concerned, maintain objectivity and impartiality and avoid becoming a party to the conflict. A peacekeeping operation's mandate to protect civilians is one of the important measures to help the countries concerned better protect civilians. As such, it cannot be a substitute for the responsibility and obligations to protect civilians incumbent upon States' Governments and parties to the conflicts. In developing the mandate to protect civilians, it is necessary to give comprehensive consideration to the situation on the ground and the peacekeeping operation's ability and conditions and ensure that the mandates are clear, realistic and feasible and that the resources and equipment are adequate and fully guaranteed. Missions should also draw up their strategies and operational plans in the light of the situation on the ground and enhance internal coordination to ensure effective implementation of their mandates.

Fourthly, humanitarian aid operations in conflict situations must comply with United Nations guiding principles on humanitarian aid, maintain their humanitarian nature, neutrality, objectivity and impartiality, and fully respect the sovereignty of the countries concerned. All parties to a conflict must ensure timely access to affected civilians in order to provide humanitarian relief. That is a major premise for the improvement of the humanitarian situation in conflict areas and the protection of civilians.

Humanitarian aid agencies must enhance communication with the countries concerned and, on the basis of winning confidence and support from all parties to ensure the effective implementation of humanitarian aid operations.

Mr. Errázuriz (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks the Lithuanian presidency for convening today's open debate on a subject of the greatest importance and priority for my country. Similarly, we are grateful for the briefings we have heard from the High Commissioner for Human Rights Pillay, Under-Secretaries-General Amos and Ladsous and Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross Daccord.

My delegation endorses the statement that will be made by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the Human Security Network, of which my country is a part.

As mentioned in the concept note (S/2014/74, annex) and the report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/689) before us — the Secretary-General's tenth report on the matter — despite the fact that we are celebrating 15 years since the Security Council adopted resolution 1265 (1999), there is little room for optimism. The briefing of Under-Secretary-General Amos speaks volumes in that regard. Civilian populations continue to be the most affected by armed conflicts, which today are, in the majority, intra-State conflicts.

The primary responsibility to protect civilian populations falls to each State. However, when that does not occur, whether deliberately or because of the incapacity of the State itself to act, the international community must seek to do so in accordance with the principles agreed upon in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (General Assembly resolution 60/1).

The negative situations we face today in the area of the protection of civilians are the result, fundamentally, of the lack of political will to confront the situation, and not the lack of instruments or mechanisms established for the purpose. Indeed, we have a comprehensive legal framework, which is known and shared by the majority of States, and which includes all the necessary elements to respond to the protection of civilians and other vulnerable groups. In many cases, there is no will to act and to allow access to humanitarian aid where it is needed, and there is a lack of willingness on the part of some Governments affected by conflict situations to understand that the humanitarian organizations, by dint of their very nature, ought to be able establish contact with non-State actors within those same States.

We welcome the Secretary-General's initiative and the "Rights up front" action plan, which reaffirms the central role that human rights play in the work of the United Nations and provides fundamental recommendations for the whole system, aimed at reacting better to and dealing swiftly with problems of human rights. Respect for human rights and for international humanitarian law is, ultimately, the central concept that underpins the protection of civilians.

In attempting to respond to some of the concerns raised by the Lithuanian presidency's concept note (S/2014/74, annex), we feel that the following elements could contribute to the better protection of civilian populations in armed conflicts.

First, there needs to be greater cooperation among the Security Council, troop- and police-contributing countries and the Secretariat in order to establish clear, realistic and achievable mandates along these lines. Missions must be able to count on the availability, in a timely and effective manner, of the necessary resources and capacities needed to achieve their mandates. In the same way, troops must be given training in the protection of civilians.

Secondly, the improvement and strengthening of early-warning systems will help us get ahead in crisis situations. In that respect, we would urge improved coordination among the various actors on the ground so that the flow of information is adequate and timely. With the same goal in mind, my delegation supports the use of new, non-weaponized technologies as tools for preventing crises. We also recognize the contribution of mechanisms, such as horizon scanning, among others, that can play a role in achieving that objective.

Thirdly, the establishment of a registry system for civilian casualties could serve as a mechanism for monitoing violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Fourthly, accountability for war crimes and serious human rights violations can serve as an element of justice and redress and as a tool for deterrence and prevention. There must be absolute certainty that abuses and crimes committed will not go unpunished.

In conclusion, we welcome the current aide-mémoire prepared by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the presidential concept note. We recognize the aide-mémoire's value as a tool for query, analysis and diagnosis in matters pertaining to the protection of civilians by the Council, Member States and other actors of the United Nations system.

Mr. Oyarzábal (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank the Lithuanian presidency of the Security Council for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and for producing the concept note (S/2014/74, annex). We also thank Ms. Navi Pillay, Ms. Valerie Amos, Mr. Hervé Ladsous and Mr. Yves Daccord for their participation in the meeting.

Unfortunately, the latest report of the Secretary-General on today's subject (S/2013/689) reaffirms that civilians continue to constitute the majority of victims in conflict. However, it is important that the Security Council continue to be committed to the protection of civilians in armed conflict by promoting full respect for international law, in particular respect for humanitarian law, human rights law and the rights of refugees, as well as the fight against impunity.

Likewise, as referred to in the President's concept note, it is imperative that we continue to include protection activities in the mandates of United Nations missions on the ground. The Secretary-General's report includes a description of the activities undertaken by peacekeeping missions in the protection of civilians. In all cases, peacekeeping forces have sought to create protected areas. The challenges they face on the ground include avoiding an escalation of violence between groups, supporting political dialogue to facilitate the protection of civilians and encouraging reconciliation between ethnic groups.

In addition, peacekeeping forces have implemented training programmes for police to investigate crimes of sexual violence and other crimes and have contributed to building domestic institutional capacity. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a special paradigm in that regard, where the Security Council decided to reconfigure the mandate to authorize a peacekeeping mission to carry out offensive operations against armed groups via an intervention brigade.

The clear position of Argentina is that the imposition of robust mandates by the Council and the implementation of those mandates by peacekeeping operations must not divert us from our fundamental mandate to protect civilians, in line with the fundamental principles that govern, and must continue to govern, peacekeeping operations. We believe that, in order for peacekeeping forces to be able to fulfil their missions effectively, where priority is given to the protection of civilians the mandates must be designed carefully. Operations must also have the necessary resources available to act effectively and in a timely manner.

With regard to the composition of missions, there needs to be an appropriate structure and the staffing that is required to protect women and children from violence, in particular sexual and gender-based violence. We recognize the United Nations policy of due diligence in the area of human rights, which should continue to be part of mandates for peacekeeping operations.

One aspect that we want to highlight with regard to peacekeeping operations relates to international humanitarian law. On the one hand, the training of troops is necessary. As for Argentina, with the help of the International Committee of the Red Cross, we carry out human rights courses for armed forces, with a particular focus on those troops that will be participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Our commission on the implementation of international humanitarian law has produced a manual on international law in armed conflict that sets out the norms of international humanitarian law to be used by armed forces in peacekeeping operations.

In addition, I would emphasize that peacekeeping operations must respect international humanitarian law. In that respect, I highlight the bulletin of the Secretary-General on "Observance by United Nations forces of international humanitarian law" (ST/SGB/1999/13).

Peacekeeping operations play an essential role in the protection of civilians in many situations. However, ensuring a secure environment for civilians goes beyond the role of peacekeeping forces; it involves the entire Organization and its States Members.

To achieve strengthened and sustainable security, national peacekeeping and institution-building efforts must be supported, including rebuilding national institutions. Coordination in the area of support for the rule of law as part of the Organization's efforts is crucial. But it is also important that the United Nations and Member States make progress on the challenges identified by the Secretary-General, with which my delegation agrees. Those include the following.

First, we must promote respect for international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law by State and other parties to conflict.

Secondly, parties to a conflict must make every effort to ensure effective and timely access to humanitarian aid, including cargo and materials. Such assistance — including access to medical personnel, transport and hospital facilities — enjoys special protection under humanitarian law in all its aspects.

Thirdly, impartial mechanisms are essential in terms of investigating violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. In addition to ad hoc commissions of inquiry, including those set up by the Human Rights Council, I should like to highlight the international commission of inquiry provided for under Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949.

Fourthly, I should like to underscore accountability. In that context, I commend the contributions of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, as well as to acknowledge the role of the International Criminal Court.

Argentina supports presidential statement S/PRST/2014/3 and stresses the useful aide-mémoire on the protection of civilians in armed conflict published by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

I should like to conclude by reiterating that, in line with international humanitarian law and the Council's resolutions, any attacks against civilians or other protected groups, as well as the recruitment of child soldiers and preventing humanitarian access, constitute violations of international humanitarian law. In that context, I again urge strict respect for the obligations under The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the four 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Protocols, international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law and Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Oh Joon (Republic of Korea): I would like to thank you, Madam President, for convening this important debate. I also express our sincere appreciation to High Commissioner Pillay, Under-Secretary-General Amos, Under-Secretary-General Ladsous and Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their excellent briefings.

The protection of civilians is a fundamental responsibility of the international community and a core function of the Security Council in safeguarding international peace and security. Over the years, the Council has taken significant steps to implement its commitment. Peacekeeping operations with a mandate to protect have been one of its most effective tools.

Resolution 1894 (2009) ensures that United Nations peacekeeping missions have protection mandates, where appropriate, and that such protection activities should be given priority. In 2013, a new mandate for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the strengthened mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo represented noteworthy achievements in that regard.

The protection of civilians lies at the core of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan's peacekeeping mandate, where armed clashes have taken a heavy toll on civilians.

Civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflict. In the case of Syria, murder, torture, rape, arbitrary detention and other inhumane acts are widespread. More than 130,000 people have been killed, a great number of which are civilians. The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, with almost half of the population in need of humanitarian assistance.

Against that backdrop, my delegation would like to highlight the following points.

First, it is essential that the Council enhance efforts to provide clear, achievable protection mandates based on a realistic assessment and adequate resources. We should also bear in mind that success or failure in the protection of civilians is the most tangible barometer of a successful mission.

Secondly, we must ensure that protection mandates are effectively implemented. In developing mission strategies, a coordinated response from the mission and all of the relevant stakeholders is essential. Protection activities must be given priority in decisions on the use of available capacities and resources. I welcome that the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/689) includes an assessment of concrete measures taken by peacekeeping missions. We commend the role of the missions in supporting political dialogue in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, providing physical protection in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and building a protective environment in Mali and in Haiti.

Thirdly, the rising challenges of unregulated small arms and the indiscriminate use of weapons in populated areas have also been noted in the report of the Secretary-General. My delegation is deeply concerned about the devastating impact on civilians. Resolution 2117 (2013), on small arms and light weapons, adopted last year, also recognizes that the illicit transfer and misuse of small arms and light weapons fuel conflict and the impact on civilians. We must intensify consideration of that issue through discussions with greater focus.

Fourthly, I would like to reaffirm that accountability is key to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Those who commit war crimes, crimes against humanity and other violations of international law must be held accountable. Accountability requires verification. There should be investigation and documentation of allegations of all violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

We recognize the significant contribution of international commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions, and we reiterate our full support to them.

While the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other international tribunals play a crucial role, the Council must do its part, including by referring relevant situations to the ICC.

Before concluding, I should like to pay tribute to the United Nations peacekeepers and humanitarian workers who are working hard to protect civilians around the world.

My delegation also strongly supports presidential statement S/PRST/2014/3, which was adopted earlier.

Mr. Nduhungirehe (Rwanda): I would like to thank your delegation, Madam President, for organizing this important debate. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General Hervé Ladsous, High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay and Director-General Yves Daccord for their respective briefings.

As the concept note (S/2014/74, annex) for this debate highlights, this year marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Security Council's engagement on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, following the landmark adoption of resolution 1265 (1999). Since then, the international community, in particular the United Nations, has adopted an array of strategies to improve and implement the protection mandates. Also over the past 15 years, the Secretary-General has put forward more than 100 recommendations to the Security Council in his successive reports on the protection of civilians. The Council has taken many steps, both in country-specific decisions and thematic resolutions, to improve the protection of civilians on the ground.

The combination of that normative framework and the continuing development of mission-wide protection of civilian strategies has led to significant improvement in the United Nations ability to conceptualize and implement effective protection mandates. However, significant work remains to ensure effective implementation on the ground.

Challenges faced in the implementation of the United Nations protection mandates can easily be identified in cases such as those of South Sudan, where the recent lapse into conflict cost thousands of innocent lives.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations has been conducting peace operations since 1999 through the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but violence against civilians by the national army and by dozens of armed groups, including the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda — a movement that includes perpetrators of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi and Rwanda — have continued unabated.

In the case of Syria, more than 130,000 people have been killed, while the Security Council has failed to act to protect innocent people — even failing to speak with one voice with regard to access to humanitarian assistance.

In the Central African Republic, where even with clear warnings of imminent danger people were lynched and killed before our eyes, we hope that the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic, supported by French and, soon, by European forces, will succeed in protecting civilians.

In any case, all those situations prove that there are still gaps in the United Nations protection mandates since the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, 20 years ago.

As the concept note puts it, the experience of the past 15 years offers many challenges and opportunities for modern peacekeeping operations with protection-of-civilians mandates. We believe that such protection can be achieved only through the concerted efforts of integrated civil, military and police components with peacekeeping operations. Those efforts take into account the special protection needs of women and children through the deployment of senior women and children protection advisers.

We believe that the failure to protect civilians on the ground begins at the earliest stages of planning. A failure to match a peacekeeping mission's mandates, strategies, structures and resources with the situation facing civilians on the ground may not lead to desired results. That is why we think that the success of any peacekeeping operation requires enhanced cooperation and better coordination between the Security Council and other United Nations bodies and agencies, including the Peacebuilding Commission. Such collaboration is even more critical when it comes to the host State, which retains the primary responsibility for the protection of its citizens, as well as with the relevant regional and subregional organizations on the basis of their respective comparative advantage.

As one of the major troop- and police-contributing countries to peacekeeping missions, Rwanda believes that the Security Council and the Secretariat should build upon the recent positive trend of holding consultations with troop-contributing countries to seek their advice and participation at the beginning of mission planning.

I should like to take this opportunity to again commend troop-contributing countries that have provided personnel in difficult and dangerous environments to fulfil the protection-of-civilians requirements in various peacekeeping missions around the world.

The best way to protect civilians is to prevent imminent conflicts from breaking out in the first place. The prevention of conflicts requires political will by the international community, particularly the Security Council, which should renew its commitment to the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as recalled by resolution 1894 (2009).

In the same vein, as Rwanda commemorates this year the twentieth anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsi, we urge the five permanent members of the Council to agree on a moral pact of conduct aimed at refraining from using the veto in situations of genocide and other mass atrocities. We thank France for its important initiative in that respect.

In conclusion, Rwanda is grateful for the efforts deployed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in close consultation with the Security Council and other relevant United Nations entities to develop and update the aide-mémoire on the protection of civilians. We believe that this document, as recognized by presidential statement S/PRST/2014/3, which was just adopted, is an important tool at the disposal of the Security Council for identifying the key protection of civilians concerned in armed conflict, based on the Council's own experience.

Mr. Adoum (Chad) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to join previous speakers in thanking you, Madam President, for organizing this debate on what is not just a relevant theme, but one that has many legal and especially ethical implications, and is therefore of interest to us all, so that we may find urgent and appropriate solutions to the problems facing the civilian victims of the various armed conflicts in the world today.

Allow me also to commend the statements made by Ms. Pillay, Mr. Ladsous, Ms. Amos and Mr. Daccord on this issue.

As has just been pointed out by other speakers, civilian populations are the main victims in armed conflict today, despite the tireless efforts of the international community to protect them by strengthening and promoting international humanitarian law, human rights and the rules, procedures and mechanisms defined at the United Nations.

International humanitarian law stipulates a whole array of rules regarding the protection of civilians, including the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Under those rules, the parties to a conflict are prohibited from withholding water and food supplies from civilians, from attacking facilities liable to release hazardous substances, and from massive and indiscriminate bombing of cities or any urban centres. Besides those general provisions, women are entitled to special treatment to protect their specific vulnerability. They are therefore protected from rape, sexual slavery and all discriminatory or degrading practices linked to their gender, such as forced prostitution, forced artificial insimination and so forth. However, we regret to note that in conflicts under way throughout the world those obligations are rarely observed. In fact, they are routinely violated.

Given the challenges related to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, we should recall and welcome the fact that the United Nations in general and the Security Council in particular have made tireless efforts to put an end to humanitarian tragedy. Thus, in its resolution 1265 (1999), the Security Council deems that certain situations characterized by grave violations of humanitarian law and human rights, particularly attacks targeting civilians, could constitute a threat to international peace and security. In resolution 1894 (2009), on the protection of civilians, the Council also reiterated its determination, obligation and responsibility to protect civilians, as well as the need to bring those responsible for the most serious crimes to justice, including by referring such cases to international justice mechanisms.

Many other relevant resolutions were also adopted on the protection of civilian populations, including resolution 1612 (2005), on children and armed conflict, which established a monitoring and reporting mechanism for parties to conflict; as well as resolution 1820 (2008), on sexual violence in armed conflict, adopted 19 June 2008, which provides for the possibility of targeted sanctions being imposed on those responsible for such crimes and gives the Secretary-General and peacekeeping operations a mandate to address the various aspects of these questions.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/689), of 22 November 2013, on the protection of civilians, and the recommendations it contains are invaluable contributions to efforts to strengthen the tools and mechanisms for the protection of civilian populations in armed conflict.

The task of protecting civilians in armed conflict is not an easy one, and difficulties on several levels make it a difficult mission to carry out. However, whatever the obstacles, the primary responsibility of ensuring the protection of civilians in an armed conflict lies with the warring parties, in particular the State, which should under no circumstances shirk its duty to protect the population from heinous crimes such as genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Those duties require that the domestic legal framework be brought in line with the country's international commitments. The State must crack down on violations of the instruments and conventions that it has ratified. Such a crackdown could be carried out by specialized military or regular tribunals. Domestic or international tribunals' efforts in that regard could very well dissuade those who, absent such consequences, would commit the most serious crimes against civilians. In that respect, the role of the International Criminal Court in the fight against impunity is a vital instrument, and one that must be strengthened and promoted.

The United Nations and regional and subregional organizations should reinforce their cooperation on questions having to do with the protection of civilians and establish a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of their joint efforts on the ground to shield civilians from the atrocities to which, unfortunately, they continue to be subjected.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the briefers for their statements today.

France aligns itself with the statement to be made by the observer of the European Union, as well as with the statement to be made by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians.

The protection of civilians is an issue that requires constant attention by the Security Council. It must be at the heart of its work. Peacekeeping operations are the primary instrument in that regard.

Since the adoption, five years ago, of resolution 1894 (2009), the Security Council, the Secretariat and all the relevant stakeholders have mobilized to improve the process of defining, monitoring and controlling the implementation of peacekeeping operations' mandates on the protection of civilians. All recent Council mandates now include a protection-of-civilians component. Such protection is therefore a priority under any circumstance. We must continue to develop that approach.

That is what we did in Mali. After the emergency intervention of French forces, the deployment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali — with a robust mandate to protect civilians — helped to stabilize the country and allowed for presidential and legislative elections to be held successfully. During our visit to the country, the Council was able to see the scope of what had been accomplished through the determined work of the United Nations. The Council also reiterated to the Malian authorities and armed groups the urgent need to launch an inclusive dialogue for a lasting solution in northern Mali, in order for the country to finally find peace.

That is what we must do in the Central African Republic. In that country, the intervention by the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic, supported by French forces — which will soon be supported by European forces — helped to prevent the atrocities beign committed against civilians from spreading. The clashes have certainly not stopped, but there has been a kind of pacification of most of Bangui. Securing certain areas, especially near the airport, allowed humanitarian aid to be organized and better deployed. The mobilization of international assistance, in Brussels and then Addis Ababa, provides a glimmer of hope.

However, the situation remains precarious, especially in the provinces. Civilians continue to be attacked. African and French forces are faced with an unprecedented situation: the hateful willingness of two communities to settle accounts. Soldiers cannot contain crowds. Looting, rapes and lynchings thus continue despite our efforts. Therefore, given the magnitude of the challenges and the nature of the threat, the Council must shoulder its responsibilities quickly. What is needed is a multidimensional peacekeeping force with a significant amount of force, including, above all, police units that are able to restore order, since soldiers cannot fire on a crowd. Only such a force, with a strong civilian component and sustainable funding, will bring lasting stability to the country, help prepare for elections and begin a national reconciliation process. We can no longer allow the crisis to get worse, or we will risk the Central African Republic becoming a source of instability in the heart of Africa and mass atrocities being committed there.

Whatever the strength of the protection-of-civilians mandates given to peacekeeping operations, they will be effective only if the operations themselves are beyond reproach. That is why we welcome the policies implemented by the Secretary-General to ensure that the work of the United Nations fully respects human rights. The zero-tolerance policy for sexual violence, the limiting of contacts with persons indicted by the International Criminal Court to that which is essential to the mission of the Organization, and the due diligence and filter policies are indispensable to the work of peacekeeping operations. They guarantee the exemplary conduct that is required of the Organization. Compliance with those policies guarantees the credibility of the Organization's work in protecting civilians.

The effectiveness of peacekeeping operations in the protection of civilians also requires closer communication to be developed with local communities in order to build capacity to prevent and react to threats. That includes, of course, a linguistic component and the appropriate means for logistics and communication, such as the recruitment of community liaison assistants.

The French Mission regrets that the Secretariat does not believe that language skills should be an essential element considered for recruitment in the field. The French Mission recalls, as it has been doing in vain for several years now, that speaking the language of the populations can be useful — even if that language is French. As in previous years, I will not be heard, and as in previous years, the Secretariat will continue to recruit without taking language skills into account, and I have been the representative of France for five years now.

I will conclude by referring the situation in Syria. As the Geneva negotiations on the future of Syria resume, the regime continues to intensify its crackdown against civilians. Barrel bombings have continued in Aleppo, again causing several hundred civilian deaths last week. While an agreement led to the evacuation of civilians from Homs, humanitarian aid convoys leaving the Old City have been attacked by mortar fire. Those deliberate attacks against civilians and humanitarian workers are unacceptable. The Council can no longer accept such repeated and flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, the primary responsibility for which lies with the regime. It must therefore call upon all parties to ensure immediate access for humanitarian aid to those in need.

The text of the draft resolution submitted yesterday by Australia, Jordan and Luxembourg is moderate. We would have preferred a stronger message, given the gravity of the crisis. But the text is a compromise to which all countries of good faith and goodwill should agree.

Furthermore, given the sense of impunity prevailing in Damascus today, the Council must send a clear message: the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria, starting with Bashar Al-Assad, should be brought to justice. That is why we once again reiterate our call for the Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Mr. Hmoud (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation extends its thanks to the Republic of Lithuania for its initiative in convening this important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We would also like to commend the report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/689), which provides a series of important recommendations on this issue and an analysis of effective ways to promote the protection of civilians. We welcome the adoption of the presidential statement (S/PRST/2014/3), including its significant elements that will provide guidelines for implementing such a commitment. We would also like to thank Ms. Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; and Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the

International Committee of the Red Cross, for their important participation in this meeting.

Our debate today is particularly important. Despite of the progress made since the adoption of resolutions 1265 (1999) and 1894 (2009) — pertaining to the commitment to international norms and instruments on this subject, the world is still witnessing grave violations with regard to protection that are difficult for the human conscience to accept. The targeting of civilians by parties to a conflict, the perpetration of crimes against them and the indiscriminate use of explosive devices in populated areas are some examples that demonstrate the failure to protect, which need to be tackled by the international community in an effective and resolute manner. Otherwise, the debates on this topic will remain theoretical and will not contribute to strengthening the concept of the protection of civilians.

The culture of respect for protection must also be promoted. That should not only be limited to national legislation and international conventions and resolutions, but we must also draw up a comprehensive United Nations strategy in that regard and develop follow-up mechanisms in order to assess the commitment of States to such a strategy. The international community must not give precedence to the pursuit of peace accords and political considerations in conflict situations over the principle of accountability for crimes perpetrated by parties to a conflict. Such parties think that they are above the law and that the international community will grant them immunity if they give up their weapons and put an end to the conflict. That has an even greater impact by further aggravating aggression against civilians and the violation of their rights. Without such a step, civilians will remain the primary and most vulnerable victims of armed conflicts.

My delegation would now like to focus its statement on the practical aspect of the concept, in particular the implementation of the protection element in United Nations peacekeeping operations mandated by the Council. In that regard, Jordan stresses that all the mandated peacekeeping tasks, and most important the protection of civilians threatened by physical violence, must be implemented in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the guidelines for peacekeeping operations, without prejudice to the primary responsibility incumbent upon the host Government to protect civilians, as well as on all parties to armed conflict. That does not exempt the international community from its duty to guarantee protection and assume such a responsibility.

We would like to underscore that all States and the relevant parties, as necessary, should give priority to respecting their obligations under the Charter, international law, international humanitarian and human rights law and international refugee law. We also stress the need to provide the necessary resources to missions to raise awareness and promote understanding with regard to their protection mandate, through close interaction with host Governments, local authorities and population.

Jordan believes that there is a number of necessary elements to ensure the effective and full implementation of the mandates for the protection of civilians, in particular close and continuous cooperation among the Security Council, troop-contributing countries and the Secretariat, so as to ensure clearly defined protection-of-civilians mandates for peacekeeping operations, as well as their possible completion. We also believe it is important to provide peacekeeping operations with logistical support and all the necessary resources, including training, taking into account the specific characteristics of each mission's mandate and on the basis of lessons learned and best pratices from United Nations peacekeeping operations and Member States.

We agree with the concept note presented by the presidency (S/2014/74, annex) with regard to the importance of protection of civilian training at all levels of mission staff in the field, including senior leadership, before and during deployment, and on the basis of lessons learned from previous and current peacekeeping operations. Since the beginning of its participation in peacekeeping operations, Jordan has prioritized the concept of the protection of civilians and continues, within the framework of training its cadres, to focus on raising the necessary awareness on this concept. International humanitarian law and provisions for the protection of civilians have been incorporated in the Jordanian armed forces training programmes, including for peacekeeping operations.

Jordan notes the importance of conducting a clear assessement in order to align the human and material resources available for the missions with the requirements for the protection of civilians and the capacity of missions to fully implement their mandates Moreover, further proposals are required to improve the capacity of existing peacekeeping operations to respond to situations that have a negative impact on civilians.

Successfully assuming the tasts related to the protection of civilians in the event of a Security Council mandate requires coordinated action by all elements of the relevant mission, within the areas of its deployment. We believe that it is important for all peacekeeping operations mandated to protect civilians to formulate and carry out a comprehensive protection strategy, which should be included in the mission's executive and general emergency plans and be subject to regular and effective evaluation.

In conclusion, Jordan emphasizes the importance of close coordination between Headquarters and the leadership in the field when it comes to the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations, especially with regard to emergency situations, as well as the importance of coordination between the United Nations and regional arrangements, including country teams as necessary, on matters relating to the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations.

Mrs. Ogwu (Nigeria): Thank you, Madam President, for convening this vital debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I also wish to thank all the briefers for their invaluable insights and significant contributions to this conversation.

Several speakers this morning have alluded to the fact that civilians are often deliberately targeted in armed conflicts and frequently subject to blatant abuse of their rights under international humanitarian law. The Security Council itself has since 1999 responded to such threats by giving United Nations peacekeeping mission the mandate to protect civilians. The presidential statement adopted by the Council today (S/PRST/2014/3) further reinforces its unflinching resolve to tackle this problem.

Over the years, several methods have been adopted to improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions in protecting civilians in conflict areas. Resolution 1894 (2009), for example, calls for the allocation of resources as an indication of the priority the Council accords to the protection of civilian activities. That underscores the need to translate normative commitments into concrete measures for the protection of civilians.

The task of protecting civilians in armed conflict is a mandate that has posed enormous challenges to peacekeeping operations, and one that requires more than normative commitments or a conceptual shift in policy. While the international community expects peacekeeping missions to perform flawlessly when protecting civilians in armed conflict, the challenges they face are often overlooked or not adequately appreciated.

The protection of civilians within the framework of peacekeeping missions has been described by the United Nations as extremely complex. That is attributed to four key points. First, peacekeeping missions often have to protect civilians in harsh conditions and with inadequate resources. Secondly, peacekeeping missions often have to operate with partners who may lack the capacity or will to do their own part. Thirdly, there is an unrealistic expectation that peacekeeping missions will be able to protect all civilians at all times. And, fourthly, peacekeeping missions often operate in dynamic environments where security situations can change very quickly. A critical examination of those challenges would show that the protection of civilians in armed conflict is indeed a task that cannot be seen as the exclusive responsibility of peacekeeping missions.

Aside from those challenges, there is the issue of the different operating methods of the mission components — military, police and civilian — involved in the protection of civilians. The autonomy to act and make decisions differs greatly between components in the light of their varying mandates, agendas, donors and standard procedures. That has raised questions regarding coordination for effective delivery on the protection of civilians. A key proposal under consideration for addressing the problem is the "One UN" concept — the idea that all United Nations activities in a given country should fall under a common umbrella to provide coherence and credibility.

The development of strategic coordination among the various mission components is crucial to success in the protection of civilians, in particular in the light of the number of actors charged with such mandates. That is achievable through the development of comprehensive training on strategic coordination of the protection of civilians for all components. It should be understood that a clear and common understanding of mission mandates is fundamental to the efficacy of strategic coordination among them.

No less significant is an understanding of the protective measures adopted by the local population in conflict areas. There is a need to develop those populations by ensuring that threats are mitigated and material assistance provided where most needed. The strengthening of national institutions is also important to enable them to discharge their primary responsibility to enhance security and the rule of law in post-conflict areas.

Missions in situations of active conflict, or where conflict is likely to occur, may face a higher tempo of protection of civilians activity. The need to anticipate and promptly respond to threats to civilians in such situations argues in favour of the timely funding of such missions. That would convey the message to mission leadership of the priority that the Council attaches to the protection of civilians. It also appropriately addresses the disparity between the objectives of meeting the demands of protecting civilians and of doing so within the resources available.

In terms of capacity and training to effectively protect civilians, the concept note (S/2014/74, annex) aptly states the critical importance of predeployment and in-mission training for peacekeepers and civilian staff. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) has been instrumental in offering training to African countries as part of its Enhancing Capacity in Africa project. Nigeria is reinforcing that effort through its firm commitment to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and emphasizes programmes on the protection of civilians at all levels of predeployment training of its peacekeeping contingents.

In consonance with that commitment, the Nigerian Army Peacekeeping Training Centre, in collaboration with UNITAR, conducted a training course on the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping operations in August 2013 for almost 25 Nigerian military and police officers as well as civilians about to be deployed to various United Nations, African Union and Economic Community of West African States missions. Nigeria will also host a United Nations-sponsored training programme in Abuja from 3 to 7 March.

In the final analysis, we believe that the protection of civilians in armed conflict is an arduous task that involves multiple issues and stakeholders. While they represent the main tool at the disposal of the international community, it is clear that peacekeeping missions alone cannot successfully accomplish that task. What is required is an all-hands-on-deck approach that recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of all the relevant stakeholders and harnesses the strengths while minimizing the weaknesses. Today's debate reinforces this valid aspiration.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

I should like to start by thanking today's four briefers for their thought-provoking contributions.

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement to be made later today by the observer of the European Union.

In 1999 the Security Council took a unanimous decision to address systematically the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Fifteen years later, the gap between the normative framework and implementation remains considerable, as civilians continue to suffer from conflict-related violence, which is increasingly intentional and brutal.

In some cases, as in the Central African Republic or South Sudan, State institutions do not have the capacity to carry out their responsibility to protect. In others, such as Syria, the State itself is a perpetrator. Wherever they operate, peacekeepers can assist the host State, but they cannot substitute for it. The primary responsibility to protect civilians rests with national Governments.

We welcome the approach taken by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in its operational concept on the protection of civilians, which encompasses three tiers of protection: support for political processes, protecting from physical violence and establishing a protective environment.

We believe that protection mandates should involve a broad range of activities, including, but not limited to, ensuring respect for international human rights and humanitarian law, facilitating humanitarian access, the return of refugees and displaced persons, human rights monitoring, the protection of women and children, and addressing sexual violence in conflict.

Furthermore, implementing protection mandates and preparing protection strategies require improved situational awareness and analysis. Relevant data and recommendations on the protection of civilians need to be systematically included in country-specific reports by the Secretariat.

Interaction and the better flow of information among missions, humanitarian actors and local populations are crucial. In particular, humanitarian and human right actors can contribute effectively to a realistic assessment of the threats and risks to the population on the ground.

Furthermore, the implementation of protection mandates requires adequate resources, structures and training. Military, police and civilian personnel should receive the relevant pre-deployment guidance and training. Having a pool of experts available on short notice through standing capacities or rosters is helpful for early planning or filling critical gaps.

We welcome the drafting by the Office of Military Affairs of baseline guidance on the protection of civilians for the military component; the development of a mobile training teams project; and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations core pre-deployment training on child protection.

Mission leadership, in our view, is crucial, as it must ensure that protection is considered a priority across the whole mission. We would also like to stress the importance of the sharing among the missions of effective protection practices. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan, for example, established an early-warning system that enabled the better protection of rural populations. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan keeps a civilian-casualty-tracking system which, combined with tactical directives focused on civilian protection, is helping to reduce civilian casualty rates. Unmanned aerial systems observing Kivu and border zones contribute to enhancing the capacity of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to respond.

Adequate resources, training and mandate definition are just one side of the story in the context of the protection of civilians. Peacekeepers cannot ensure the protection of civilians in an environment where lawlessness and impunity prevail. Strengthening the rule of law and building local justice mechanisms and judicial capacities to tackle impunity constitute an important part of protection efforts. Ensuring accountability is an important deterrent in itself and thus a contributing factor to success in protecting civilians.

International justice mechanisms such as mixed and special tribunals, as well as the International Criminal Court, have an important role to play in that regard. The Council must place special emphasis on ending impunity for war crimes, crimes against humanity and gross violations of human rights. The perpetrators of such crimes, as well as all those who attack and kill humanitarian and medical workers, journalists and peacekeepers, must know that there is no escaping justice.

This year marks the sixty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, the foundation of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. But today we also mark the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers. Perpetrators against their will, such children are also the tragic victims of conflict. It is incumbent upon the Council to make sure that those children, as well as all of the countless civilian victims who continue to suffer conflict-related atrocities, are guaranteed the protection they need.

My delegation supports the recommendations contained in the reports of the Secretary-General and welcomes the presidential statement adopted earlier today (S/PRST/2014/3). The urgency of implementation cannot be stressed enough. Bridging the gap between the normative basis and concrete actions on the ground is paramount to saving lives.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

In view of the fairly long list of speakers, I should like to encourage everyone speaking to respect the four-minute limit in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with longer statements are encouraged to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a shorter version when speaking in the Chamber. I wish to inform all members concerned that we shall be carrying on this debate right through the lunch hour, so that we can all speak before it is very late into the night.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Urmas Paet, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia.

Mr. Paet (Estonia): At the outset, let me congratulate Lithuania, the first Baltic State to serve on the Security Council, on having assumed the presidency of the Council.

The Secretary-General notes in his latest report (S/2013/689) that the current state of the protection of civilians leaves little room for optimism. Estonia strongly condemns all forms of violence against civilian populations and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. We hear with great concern about children being killed and maimed in

Syria and women being raped in the Central African Republic. The outbreak of armed conflict should be avoided to the extent possible by using all available measures.

The greatest responsibility to maintain stability and to find sustainable solutions guaranteeing the safety of civilians is in the hands of the State concerned. However, if the conflict is escalating despite all preventive efforts and there is a risk that the lives of civilians might be in danger, the international community, with the Security Council at the helm, must act.

In addition to systematically condemning the violations, the Council can also use targeted measures against those who commit the violations, mandate a commission of inquiry or even refer the situations to the International Criminal Court.

There are numerous examples that prove the crucial significance of United Nations peacekeeping missions as the first stabilizing force to reach a conflict area. United Nations peacekeepers have often played a central role in restoring peace and preventing tragic losses of human life.

Estonia continues to support United Nations peacekeeping efforts. That is evidenced by the fact that last year we raised our contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations considerably, sending our military observers to the most complicated areas in the world. Under the auspices of the United Nations, Estonians are currently serving without any caveats in the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. But the bulk of our peace-support troops are still deployed as part of the International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan.

Maintaining peace and protecting civilians is the ultimate goal and requires a quick and determined reaction. That is why Estonia has decided to take part, with an infantry platoon, in a European Union-led peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic. We remember the Rwandan genocide in 1994, when the international community reacted too late. Such situations should never happen again.

United Nations peacekeeping operations receive mandates from the Security Council. Therefore it is also the Security Council that bears responsibility for setting realistic margins for operations. A clear and precise assessment of the situation on the ground is a prerequisite for the sufficient allocation of resources and operational capabilities. The clarity of a mandate will have a direct impact on the success of the operation. Therefore, in order to strengthen the means to protect civilians, the Council should also remain involved in the implementation process.

Estonia is particularly concerned about the implications of armed conflicts for the most vulnerable groups. There is growing understanding that women and children are impacted uniquely and disproportionately by the effects of conflict and its aftermath. I should like to encourage the Council to include in the mandates of peacekeeping missions provisions on human rights monitoring, with special focus on the rights of children and women. We also urge the further and timely deployment of gender advisers, women's protection advisers and child protection advisers to peacekeeping missions. In addition, I should like to stress that the predeployment training must cover the subjects of sexual and gender-based violence and the protection of children. Bearing that in mind, I welcome the Secretary General's "Rights up front" initiative to make the United Nations more accountable for its responsibilities. That is an awaited move forward in acknowledging the crucial need to respond as early as possible to human rights violations.

The protection of civilians is based on the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality. Estonia has focused its development cooperation, humanitarian assistance and human rights activities on supporting the countries in most need — Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Mali, South Sudan and Somalia, to name a few.

Over the past couple of years, Estonia has supported efforts to alleviate the humanitarian situation of refugees from Syria with almost €1 million. Recently, Estonia has also provided €100,000 for the effort to relieve the situation of internally displaced people suffering violence in the Central African Republic. However, we are in a situation where humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) experience increasing difficulties in reaching the most vulnerable parts of society affected by conflict. With great disappointment, I have to admit that the humanitarian space is shrinking. The latest examples are Syria and the Central African Republic. Humanitarian organizations and NGOs often have to make compromises in order to get access to conflict areas. Those limitations function as alarming hindrances to humanitarian principles.

The Security Council needs to send a clear message to all parties in armed conflict and to remind them of their obligations. Violations of international humanitarian, human rights law and international criminal law must be condemned. All parties to an armed conflict must refrain from targeting civilians. They must also facilitate humanitarian operations and allow rapid and unimpeded passage of relief consignments, equipment and personnel to all affected populations. The protection of organizations and institutions providing humanitarian assistance, as well as humanitarian workers, assets and goods, must be ensured at all times. It is important to set up simplified, expedited mechanisms such as the registration of humanitarian organizations and project agreements, the exemption of humanitarian goods and workers from fees, duties and taxes, in-country movement of personnel and goods, and visas.

Parties to conflict must facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance in the most effective ways, including, where appropriate, across lines and borders. I agree that it is important for national and international humanitarian actors to ensure a more coordinated approach to negotiating, securing and maintaining access. Estonia welcomes the initiative of Switzerland to produce legal and operational guidance and training materials on the matter.

Our goal must be to prevent conflicts, grave crimes and human rights violations. We must strive for a deterrence-centred approach; but, whenever it is clear that unacceptable war crimes and violations of human rights have taken place, we must act in a timely way and bring the persons responsible for the atrocities to justice. By ensuring that there are effective mechanisms for investigating and prosecuting crimes, we strengthen accountability and decrease the possibility that similar inhumane injustices will happen again.

National Governments have the primary responsibility to adopt and adjust their domestic legislation to ensure the prosecution of persons suspected of grave crimes. Building up strong and effective legislation is a prerequisite for protecting witnesses and victims — whose cooperative engagement in court proceedings is crucial. States must also ensure that their investigative and judicial infrastructure has the knowledge and capacity to prosecute atrocity crimes. Witness-protection programmes must be in place to ensure the safety of those brave enough to testify.

In addition to national mechanisms, the international criminal system must also be constantly strengthened. Especially significant is the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has the power to deter further atrocities or prevent their escalation. But the ICC's jurisdiction is limited to the territory of States parties unless the Security Council is willing to refer the matter to the ICC. In other words, the ICC can meet its full potential only when national Governments are determined to cooperate with the Court, but also only if the Security Council is willing to enforce that cooperation and to refer all appropriate situations consistently. Otherwise, civilians would be unequally protected in armed conflicts throughout the world.

To sum up, allow me to repeat the five crucial points for Estonia in today's debate. First, the protection of civilians must remain the central idea behind peacekeeping operations. Estonia remains determined to support peacekeeping efforts. Secondly, the mandates of peacekeeping operations must set achievable goals and should be adequately resourced. Thirdly, protecting civilians means protecting human rights, and vice versa. The Secretary-General's "Rights up front" initiative is a step in the right direction. Fourthly, violations of international humanitarian and human rights law must be condemned and the protection of humanitarian workers must be ensured at all times. Humanitarian assistance remains a crucial part of protecting civilians. Fifthly, former Estonian President Lennart Meri said once, "Crimes against humanity are crimes against humanity regardless of who commits them". Therefore, those who are responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international criminal law must be brought to justice. That is possible only when national Governments adopt corresponding legislation, empower their domestic judicial systems, ensure the protection of witnesses and support and cooperate with the ICC. It is the responsibility of all States to put an end to atrocities and to impunity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank the delegation of Lithuania for having organized this open debate to commemorate the 15 years since the Security Council gave fresh impetus to the task of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We are also grateful to Ms. Navi Pillay, Ms. Valerie Amos, Mr. Hervé Ladsous and Mr. Yves Daccord for their respective statements.

We also appreciate the concept note (S/2014/74, annex) circulated by the presidency among all delegations, which contains valuable guidelines to focus our debate, since the issue is extraordinarily complex and the mandate is so broad that we must prioritize our activities in order to be able to generate the necessary funding.

In the past two years, we have had the privilege of having contributed to the development of the evolving conceptual framework behind the protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict. It was during our membership of the Council that the Security Council adopted resolutions 2086 (2013) — the first to recognize the importance of the protection of civilians as part of the multidimensional mandate of a peacekeeping operation — and 2106 (2013), which also established the practice for staff of peacekeeping operations — military and civilian alike — to be given extensive training in gender issues, including on sexual violence and gender-based violence, all of this in the framework of the protection of civilians.

In his tenth report on the subject (S/2013/689), of 22 November 2013, the Secretary-General clearly identifies that the protection of civilians is a fundamental duty, and for the parties to a conflict a legal obligation to be met by all. He also indicates that his previous recommendations, including the five basic challenges for improving the protection of civilians, are still in force. He also requests the Council to review them and add them to those contained in the present report. Our delegation shares that point of view.

At the same time, it is worth reiterating that United Nations contingents cannot substitute for the State in complying with the latter's basic commitment to protect its civilian population. When States are unable or unwilling to honour that basic commitment, we face major humanitarian disasters, as we have seen again and again in recent years and even in the past few weeks in Syria, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, among others.

The recent joint investigation by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) criticizing the Council for not having offered clearer and more detailed guidelines that would have permitted the United Nations to improve the ability to offer effective protection to civilian populations is eloquent in that regard.

On the other hand, let me return to one of the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General concerning support for the investigation of serious violations involving the use of modern technologies, such as distance-guided aircraft and remotely controlled weapons. Those technologies make it more difficult to apply the fundamental norms of international humanitarian law concerning the distinction and proportionality of those methods or asymmetric conflicts and precautions. That may prevent the determination of responsibility and the prevalence of impunity that allows the proliferation of mass atrocities and serious violations of human rights. We have insisted on the singular utility of the Rome Statute and the International Criminal Court in making determinations of individual or collective responsibility, as the case may be.

Finally, I should like to acknowledge OCHA for preparing an update of the aide-mémoire, which constitutes a practical guide to the study of issues related to the protection of civilians and which describes various measures that can be considered and adapted to each situation in the preparation of the mandates of peacekeeping and other relevant missions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sweden.

Mr. Grunditz (Sweden): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries, namely, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

We welcome Lithuania's initiative to hold an open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and we thank the four briefers for their important contributions and excellent leadership.

The Nordic countries welcome the latest report of the Secretary General under review today (S/2013/689), as well as the adoption by the Council of presidential statement S/PRST/2014/3 and its updated aide-mémoire. The Nordic countries also welcome the Secretary-General's "Rights up front" action plan, which puts the imperative to protect people and preventive efforts at the heart of United Nations strategies and operational activities. Promoting respect for international humanitarian law and human rights by States and non-State armed groups alike, and ensuring accountability for violations, is fundamental.

A new generation of peacekeeping mandates has emerged. Peacekeeping operations are increasingly given a robust mandate and are being deployed to places with high levels of violence. Efforts to protect civilians and minimize civilian harm should begin at the very early planning stages of a mission. We therefore encourage the efforts to strengthen the effective implementation of the protection-of-civilians mandates in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Ensuring that Council-mandated missions have a strong human rights-monitoring mandate and adequate, as well as modern, resources to implement the mandate should be part of those efforts. One starting point must be the mission-specific conditions, recognizing the different needs of men, women, boys and girls. The Nordic countries support the Secretary-General's human rights due diligence policy as an important tool to strengthen the implementation of human rights on the ground and to prevent atrocities.

The Nordic countries also strongly encourage the incorporation of a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations. As part of the Nordic Defence Cooperation, we have established the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations in Stockholm, and note with satisfaction that the demand for its services is increasing.

Attacks against humanitarian workers are war crimes, which may also amount to crimes against humanity, and should not go unpunished. We are deeply concerned at the increasing attacks against, and killing of, humanitarian workers and the impunity that persists for those crimes. We are particularly concerned that the denial of health care and food, as well as attacks on hospitals and schools, are deliberately used as a tool to inflict harm on the civilian population in some conflicts. That violates the most fundamental principles of humanity as well as humanitarian law itself. Attacking health care and food aid — which are core elements in humanitarian action — is indeed an attack against the whole humanitarian system. The horrific tragedy in Syria is a case in point. We call on the parties to that conflict immediately to uphold their obligations to protect civilians and to facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access to the whole territory. Immediate progress in humanitarian access is crucial for improving conditions for the civilian population in Syria. We support the adoption of a Security Council resolution to address this urgent matter.

Efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence in conflict must be strengthened. The Nordic countries welcome Security Council resolution 2122 (2013) and its much-needed focus on women's participation and empowerment. We look forward to it being translated into action.

Specialized capacity and focus are needed to prevent conflict-related sexual violence in United Nations operations. We welcome the deployment of women's protection advisers in five ongoing missions. We urge the Secretariat to undertake an early evaluation of their work to assess their contribution in the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence. We fully support the development and implementation of predeployment and in-mission training of peacekeeping personnel on sexual and gender-based violence. We must seek to ensure that all peacekeepers are being trained to the same standards and operate accordingly.

In order to combat sexual and gender-based violence, perpetrators must be brought to justice. All parties to an armed conflict should take all the steps necessary to ensure accountability, through national prosecutions or by referrals to the International Criminal Court. National capacity must be enhanced to investigate and prosecute those crimes.

The use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas puts the civilian population at grave risk of death and injury and increases the destruction of vital infrastructure. The indiscriminate and disproportionate use of explosive weapons that we witness in many situations today must never be accepted. The need to ensure appropriate restrictions on warfare in such areas remains one of the central challenges of contemporary armed conflict.

At the same time, experience from Afghanistan and Somalia demonstrates how armed forces may, if the will is there, in fact restrain the use of explosive weapons in populated areas without impeding military effectiveness. We support the Secretary-General's call for States to share information on policy and practice regarding that matter. We stand ready to contribute in developing practical measures and guidance on the basis of lessons learned.

Lastly, I should like to recall that the adoption and — even more important — the full implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty will be an important instrument in preventing armed violence and reducing human suffering, including gender-based violence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): At the outset, allow me to extend my sincere congratulations to you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month and to highly commend the Lithuanian presidency for convening this important meeting.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement that will be delivered shortly by the observer of the European Union. I should like to add the following in my national capacity.

The fifteenth anniversary of the Security Council's engagement on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the adoption of its landmark resolution 1265 (1999) provides us with the opportunity to take stock of the efforts made so far and to reflect upon ongoing and emerging concerns. This is also an opportunity to stress once again that the protection of civilians goes hand-in-hand with full respect for international humanitarian and human rights law; one must not be separated from the other.

The hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the First World War is an occasion to reflect on the profoundly changed nature of war, in which civilians are increasingly becoming the primary target. In the First World War the ratio between military deaths and direct civilian deaths was 10 to 1. These days, civilian casualties in conflict often surpass those on the military side. Simply said, victims of modern armed conflict are much more likely to be civilians than solders. Civilians are regularly targeted and are subject to indiscriminate attacks and other violations by parties to the conflict. Because of all of that, today's topic is not only timely: we must return to it over and over again when needed.

As stated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2013/689), the current state of the protection of civilians leaves little room for optimism. The conflict in Syria represents a stark example — unfortunately not the only one — of how devastating is the impact of conflicts on civilians and how torn the fabric of civilian society can become. It is a collective tragedy composed of countless individual dramas and misery, so often lost and forgotten in the tide of destruction.

Croatia, remembering too well the horrors of war, strongly condemns the continued widespread, systematic and gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Syria, including targeted killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, sexual violence and the use and recruitment of children to participate in hostilities.

We are appalled by reports of rape and other forms of sexual violence that are being used as weapons of war, targeting in particular women and girls. That is not isolated to a single conflict, nor can it be regarded as collateral damage of war. It is of the utmost importance that rape and other forms of sexual violence in conflict be recognized as war crimes and crimes against humanity and fall under the competence of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Against that background, we fully welcome the further institutional dialogue between the ICC and the Security Council.

While the increased use of sexual and gender-based violence as a war tactic has already been addressed in the Security Council, most notably through its resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008), it is undeniable that this kind of violence continues to occur at an alarming rate. It is therefore necessary for United Nations peacekeeping operations to effectively address the impact of armed conflict on women and children and to support women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding as much as possible. Women should also play an important role in peacekeeping missions in order to enhance confidence-building with the targeted communities.

With all the aforesaid in mind, Croatia joined the United Kingdom's initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflict and supported the elaboration of an international protocol on the investigation and documentation of rape and sexual violence in conflict.

The link between the protection of civilians and peacekeeping operations is crucial. The safety and security of civilians is critical for the legitimacy of peacekeeping missions, which operate in complex and challenging conditions. The success of a peacemaking or peacekeeping mission will largely be judged upon its ability to protect the most vulnerable parts of the population.

One cannot thoroughly address today's topic without mentioning the responsibility to protect — a vital part of the efforts needed to prevent suffering and protect civilians from it. I should also like to use this opportunity to stress that all Croatian civilian and military personnel participating in international missions and operations must go through rigorous training. The Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior, in their training centres, regularly organize international predeployment courses for all staff, including diplomats, which are selected to be deployed in United Nations, European Union or NATO missions or operations abroad. The Ministry of Defence is also conducting a United Nations protection-of-civilians course based on the official Department of Peacekeeping Operations modules, while the Ministry of the Interior's training is based on the United Nations police officers course.

Croatia is firmly committed to the promotion and protection of international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as their vital function concerning the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We strongly urge all parties in conflict to respect international obligations, bearing in mind that the State and local authorities carry the primary responsibility for the implementation of international humanitarian and human rights law and have to be held accountable for that.

Croatia firmly supports the recommendations from the report of the Secretary-General, especially the one on establishing a common United Nations system systematically to record civilian casualties. We are of the view that a close connection has to be achieved between all the relevant actors — military troops on the ground, fact-finding missions, commissions of inquiry and the staff of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Finally, we welcome the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2014/3 with the updated aide-mémoire on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Mukerji (India): We thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity. Given the paucity of time and the large number of speakers, I will read out an abridged version of our statement, which is being circulated for the record.

We thank the briefers at this meeting and the Secretary-General for his report (S/2013/689). We also thank and congratulate you, Madam President, for the concept note circulated for this meeting (S/2014/74, annex).

As the concept note reminds us, this year marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Council's engagement on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. However, the targeting of civilians is not a recent phenomenon. It in fact predates the United Nations first large-scale mission, which was launched in the Congo in 1960. It certainly goes back to the two world wars of past century, which saw large-scale killing of civilians in concentration camps and indiscriminate air raids. We also need to take cognizance of the grim conclusion that dispatching foreign troops does not automatically protect the civilian population.

We need to ask: who is the civilian and who is the combatant? Are the civilians the tens of thousands of Nuer who last December took refuge in the compounds of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in Juba? Or are they the equal number of Dinka who were doing so in United Nations compounds in Jonglei? We need to question whether a robust mandate automatically translates into the protection of civilians?

On 19 December 2012, some 2,000 armed youths attacked the UNMISS base in Akobo that was providing protection to Dinka refugees. The 40 Indian peacekeepers were heavily outnumbered. They had superior fire power and a robust mandate that would have allowed them to use force, not just in self-defence but also in defence of the mandate. Had they opened, fire hundreds of lives would have been lost. Would those lives have been civilians or combatants? And the troops who availed themselves of their superior fire power, would they have been peacekeepers or war-makers?

Those are real-life situations. They are known to those who have boots on the ground, and to those who give up their lives in defence of the highest ideals of the United Nations. While a bloodbath was avoided on 19 December 2012, Warrant Officers Kumar Pal Singh and Dharmesh Sangwan paid for it with their supreme sacrifice. Were they exposed to risks that were unacceptably high? That is a tragic but real conundrum that cannot be ignored.

The concept note very correctly refers to the disparity between mandated tasks and allocated resources being an important challenge. The note can certainly not be accused of overstating the case. The Working Group on Contingent-Owned Equipment met last month for the first time in three years. Troop-contributing countries (TCCs) asked for a revision of the daily allowance. It is now $1.28 per day, and has been so for the past 20 years. The TCCs also asked for a revision of the rest-and-recuperation allowance. It is $10 per day, and has been so for the past decade. The Committee could, however, only agree to an overall increase of $0.75 per cent to the contingent-owned-equipment rate. The challenge that the United Nations faces in the disparity between mandates and resources is truly an important one.

Turning to mandates and their interpretation, the concept note again very wisely refers to the requirement for consultation, including among the Council, the Secretariat and troop-contributing countries, prior to the establishment of and throughout the life cycle of peacekeeping missions.

Troop-contributing countries put at risk the lives of their soldiers in the service of the United Nations. The TCCs know the situation on the ground better than most, as they are in daily touch with developments and can, on the basis of practical experience, advise on what needs to be done. Their advice will be sound, objective and unbiased. It can serve the Council well.

Some five decades ago when the first operation was set up, in the Congo, there was a conflict within a State. Regional Powers were involved. There was a collapse of administration and the United Nations was invited in. At one stage, India provided 6,000 of the 16,000 troops deployed. Fifty-three years ago, my predecessor the Permanent Representative C.S. Jha spelled out why India wanted to have an influence on the Council's thinking. His words are just as valid today. He said,

> "We cannot forget, nor should the Council forget, that we have involved ourselves in the Congo at very great sacrifice, and that involvement does not mean merely the discomfort, the inconveniences and sometimes the loss of life to our young men serving in the Congo. This involvement is related to the whole state of public opinion in our country, and, ourselves being a democratic country, this naturally has a great influence on our Parliament and on our Government." (*S/PV.982, p. 4*)

Alhough C.S. Jha voiced our views on what needed to be done, the views were ignored. Things started to go bad. More than half a dozen troop contributors withdrew from the Congo operations because they could not agree with the way it was run by the Council and by the Secretariat. That is, inter alia, why we ask that consultations be held whenever there is a change in the situation on the ground. The TCCs are the first to know that things are going wrong. Consultations must be held before the Council changes a mandate. The TCCs must know and accept in advance material changes to the terms and conditions under which they committed their troops. That is also important for TCCs because their Governments, Parliaments and their people want to know why their soldiers have been sent into situations not anticipated when the United Nations request for forces was accepted.

We hear in the corridors of this building that the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is going to change. We have not been told, but those who wield the pen would know.

We understand that you, Madam President, will be organizing an open debate on the rule of law next week. We do not know if we will participate. When we spoke in the Council on 24 November 1961 our voice was not heard. We fear that the same may happen today. We hope that the consequences will not be the same. In the event that we do not make ourselves heard on 19 February, we avail ourselves of this opportunity to request the members of the Council to remind themselves of the requirements of Article 44 of the Charter of the United Nations. The rule of law, as far as the Council is concerned, requires TCCs to participate in the Council's decisions, and not just be consulted on them.

In conclusion, I will lay a few questions before the entire membership of the United Nations, because it is on their behalf that the Council acts.

Does the peacekeeper shoot to protect? Should he have done so on 19 December 2013? Should he do so in the Democratic Republic of the Congo once a revised mandate is adopted for the entire Mission that requires — not as an exception but as a rule — MONUSCO to take on targeted offensive operations against armed groups? Who will then be the civilian and who will then be the combatant when we cross the Mogadishu line in the Democratic Republic of the Congo once again?

The President: I give the floor now to the representative of Mexico.

Mr. Montaño (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico would like to thank the presidency of Lithuania for having chosen this item for its first open debate. Civilians in armed conflict are still the majority of victims, largely due to the use of weapons in densely populated areas.

I should also like to thank the speakers who spoke before me in introducing their respective reports, as well as the Secretary-General for his tenth periodic report on this item (S/2014/689).

Peacekeeping operations are the most important means available to the Organization to protect civilians, but they are also among its most complex tasks. That is why it is crucial to have the utmost conceptual and operational clarity for this mandate in all of the stages of a peacekeeping operation and among all of its components and actors. It is crucial to guarantee that the resources that are authorized and deployed correspond to the descriptions and expectations of the mandates granted to missions, and that they serve to build the capacity of national Governments. Let us not forget, nonetheless, that the main responsibility for the protection of civilians falls upon the parties in conflict, and in particular the States.

Mexico believes that the United Nations system, especially the Security Council, has the necessary tools to achieve the effective protection of civilians in armed conflict. That is why my delegation would like to point out that effective protection for civilians must guarantee absolute respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law by all actors, including the Organization. Mexico fully supports the action plan entitled "Rights up front".

As established in resolution 2117 (2013), the illicit trafficking and accumulation of small arms and light weapons impedes peacemaking and keeping. We therefore reiterate our appeal for Member States to join or ratify the Arms Trade Treaty.

We agree with the Secretary-General's vision on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles. As he points out in his report,

> "Maintaining the distinction between ... counter-terrorism operations and the Mission's stabilization activities is important, including for the effective protection of civilians and humanitarian action." (*S/2013/689, para. 43*)

Allow me to remind the Council that, in the context of the recent session of the General Assembly, my delegation introduced a draft resolution that sought to establish for the first time that the use of those technologies should be carried out in full compliance with international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction and proportionality.

Mexico reaffirms its concern about the restrictions to humanitarian access that have prevented the safe and timely delivery and supply of assistance that we have seen, unfortunately, very recently in Syria and South Sudan. Those limitations on the flow of assistance and the attacks on humanitarian personnel require urgent attention from the Security Council and the rest of the States Members of the United Nations.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our support for the French proposal to draft a code of conduct among the five permanent members of the Security Council whereby, when considering allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide, the permanent five will renounce their right to exercise the veto.

In a few weeks, we will mark the twentieth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda. We note that the international community has made substantial progress since then in improving the protection of civilians and that the Council has been a fundamental part of that process. However, it is clear that, although we have a long way to go, intensifying our efforts to create a true culture of protecting civilians at the national and international levels should not, under any circumstances, be merely an option, but rather our collective obligation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate Lithuania on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

Jewish tradition places great importance on upholding the sanctity of life. The Talmud famously teaches that "Whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world." The Talmud also goes on to teach that "Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world." In Syria, almost 130,000 worlds have been destroyed.

We will soon mark the third anniversary of the Syrian conflict, and there is no end in sight. We cannot sit comfortably in this Chamber discussing the protection of civilians in armed conflict when, before our eyes, the crisis in Syria has reached catastrophic proportions. We have all been criticized for not doing anything substantial to help the people of Syria. The endless meetings, discussions and good intentions are not good enough. All of that is doing nothing to change the situation on the ground. Each of us represents a nation, but we also represent the aspirations of millions of people throughout the world. The Security Council has often been divided on the issue of Syria, but time is running out. The Syrian people cannot wait as the wheels of diplomacy spin in the mud of debates and dialogues.

How many nations can say that they truly help protect civilians? Looking back on 2013, it is clear that very few had the courage to act on their ideals. When hostilities erupted in the Central African Republic, the African Union acted swiftly to avert a potential genocide. And when violent extremists began a swift campaign of terror in northern Mali, France took the lead with decisive action that saved the lives of countless civilians.

Each and every country must do its part. Horrified by the savagery and violence that has ravaged Syria, Israel has refused to be indifferent to the suffering. We have treated hundreds of Syrians in desperate need of medical care.

When Governments are unable or unwilling to protect their civilians, the United Nations is often the last line of defence. Peacekeepers have saved tens of thousands of lives, but the reality is that millions of civilians are still in need of protection. Those innocent men and women turn to the United Nations for help, but find themselves standing alone.

I want to thank the Permanent Representative of India, who spoke just now, for raising important questions that need to be addressed by the Council honestly and openly. In this age of modern warfare, it is difficult to distinguish between combatants and bystanders. Petty politics have drained the efforts and attention of the Security Council. Instead of opening the channels of humanitarian aid, little more than a trickle of assistance is reaching those who need it the most.

If we are really honest with ourselves, then we will admit that we have not done enough. Somewhere in the world there is a mother shielding her children as rockets and mortars explode all around. Somewhere in the world there is a father crawling through rubble searching for scraps of food to feed his hungry children. And somewhere in the world there are children labouring day and night to help ease the burden on their families.

Ronald Reagan said, "Let us be sure that those who come after will say ... that in our time we did everything that could be done."

Those men, women and children should not stand alone. We should be standing at their side, easing their burden and ensuring a safer and more secure future for them. We share the fundamental responsibility to protect civilians from the three "Ts" — terror, torment and tyranny. We must set aside our differences and make a lasting change for generations to come.

The clock is ticking, and time is running out. It is time to stop talking and take decisive action. Every life we save is a world unto itself. No nation is free from responsibility. I call on each and every one of us today to act now.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Seger (Switzerland): I am pleased to take the floor on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, which is comprised of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Uruguay.

I would like to thank the Lithuanian presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's important debate.

The Group of Friends welcomes the latest report of the Secretary-General under review today (S/2013/689). In the past couple of months, crises have emerged, re-emerged or have been amplified in many different places, and it is with great concern that we observe that the number of civilians affected by armed conflict has significantly increased over the period covered by the report in almost all of the countries reviewed. While all civilians may be victims of conflict in various ways, women and children are particularly exposed during all stages of armed conflict. The full implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions is crucial in that regard.

The Group of Friends also welcomes the adoption of today's presidential statement (S/PRST/2014/3), which endorses the revised aide-mémoire, reflecting important developments since the adoption of resolution 1894 (2009), whose implementation remains the overall way forward for ensuring the effective protection of civilians. In the same vein, the Group of Friends notes with interest the Secretary-General's "Rights up front" action plan, which places the imperative to protect people and preventive efforts at the heart of United Nations strategies and operational activities.

The Group of Friends also notes the Under-Secretary-General's assessment in her briefing today that

> "Mandating peacekeeping missions to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence remains among the most significant actions taken by the Security Council to enhance protection".

Resolution 2086 (2013) recognized the importance of that mandated task in the context of modern, multidimensional peacekeeping missions.

The Group welcomes the normative progress that has been made through the development of training, guidance and policies, and acknowledges the need to translate that into action. Mission assessment and planning processes, where appropriate, should prioritize the protection of civilians and the resources and capabilities that are required to address them.

Member States and peacekeeping missions should continue efforts to train and support peacekeepers so as to address the challenges and scenarios they may face in the field, drawing on materials that have been developed by the United Nations. The Group also encourages the Secretariat to continue its work in developing further guidance for peacekeeping missions to work alongside host Governments to build the long-term capacity to protect civilians.

While the core challenges in the protection of civilians identified in the previous reports of the Secretary-General still need our sustained attention, the latest report (S/2013/689) also identifies several protection policy priorities that need to be explored. In particular, the following emerging issues would benefit from our attention, and the Group of Friends stands ready to act as a platform to advance them.

First, we need to address the arbitrary withholding of consent to relief operations. The Group recalls that international humanitarian law obliges all parties to a conflict to protect civilian populations from the effects of such conflicts. One way that that can be achieved is by allowing and facilitating access for humanitarian relief operations, including by simplifying and expediting procedures for the rapid and unhindered delivery of life-saving assistance. The Group is concerned about intimidation, threats, arrests, detentions, injuries and killings of humanitarian workers.

In that regard, the Group notes the intention of the Secretary-General to examine the issue of arbitrarily withholding consent to relief operations. We note the fact that several drafting seminars involving legal experts from diverse backgrounds have taken place. Responding to the Secretary-General's recommendation in that regard, the Group expresses its readiness to discuss their findings, among other inputs, with a view to elaborating guidance on how to facilitate consent in a peaceful manner. All parties to a conflict must abide by international humanitarian principles and practices to protect civilians; the international community needs to take the initiative to guarantee that.

Secondly, we turn to the issue of casualty tracking and recording. The Group of Friends notes that civilian casualty tracking, where practicable, plays an important role in efforts to reduce harm to civilians. The Group of Friends calls on parties to a conflict, as well as United Nations peacekeeping missions, to recognize the potential value of such a role. With regard to casualty recording and in the light of the recent presentation of the "Rights up front" action plan, the Group notes the continuation of efforts to ensure effective and credible recording mechanisms, noting further that the establishment of systematic and credible records of civilian casualties in the right context could support broader efforts to monitor and report on violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, while taking into account the practical challenges in recording casualties, civilian or otherwise.

Finally, on the issue of lethal autonomous weapon systems, the Group is of the view that further discussions are needed and welcomes the fact that the issue will be examined in Geneva in May 2014, in the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. The Group hopes that such discussions will also examine the issue with due consideration to the protection of civilians as part of a comprehensive debate that includes legal, military, operational, technological and ethical perspectives. In time, discussion should focus on the relevance of such systems to the protection of civilians, in particular, in the context of international humanitarian law and with regard to the principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality.

(*spoke in French*)

Allow me now to briefly touch on three points in my national capacity.

First, Switzerland shares the Secretary-General's concerns regarding humanitarian access, particularly in Syria and the Sudan, where millions of people are in great need of assistance. As other delegations have already stated, States have the primary responsibility to protect their civilian populations and must therefore allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian actors to civilians in need.

Secondly, we support direct interaction with non-State armed groups to protect civilians in situations of conflict. The existence of a dialogue in no case confers legitimacy on any armed group nor on its methods. But today it is not realistic to believe that civilians can be protected in modern-day conflicts without the direct or indirect involvement of armed groups. The Secretary-General quite rightly identified that issue as being one of the main challenges for the protection of civilians, and a welcome step would consist in identifying the best practices and experiences of the United Nations and other actors in a future report by the Secretary-General.

Thirdly and finally, my neighbour from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has already mentioned the joint initiative with Switzerland to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law. I will limit myself to calling on all States to actively participate in the consultations that the ICRC and Switzerland will continue to organize to that end.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Barriga (Liechtenstein): We welcome the report by the Secretary-General (S/2013/689) on the protection of civilians, especially the emphasis placed on the five core challenges. Let me use the opportunity today to focus on two of them, namely, enhancing humanitarian access and accountability.

The protection of civilians must be addressed by a broad range of stakeholders, including those present here today. While the parties to conflict bear the obligation to comply with international humanitarian law, and are thus primarily responsible for the protection of civilians, the Security Council also has an important role to play.

As the guardian of international peace and security, the Council must respond decisively when massive violations of international humanitarian law escalate a conflict, as we have been witnessing in Syria for such a prolonged period now. The arbitrary denial of humanitarian access should be among the Council's core concerns and triggers for action. As stated by the Secretary-General in his report, parties to conflict must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief. The presidential statement from October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15) represented a rare and welcome moment of unity in the Council, but it did not lead to any changes on the ground.

It is now high time for the Council to step up the pressure and adopt a resolution urging all parties to conflict to make sure that civilians in need can be reached and that humanitarian and medical personnel are adequately protected. Given the lack of implementation of the presidential statement, the resolution should at the very least make it clear that the Council will, in cases of non-compliance, follow up with measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. We call upon Council members to adopt such a resolution without further delay, thereby fulfilling their responsibility under the Charter. It would be inexcusable to use or threaten the use of the veto against such a draft resolution, aimed at preventing or ending violations of international humanitarian law, many of which may amount to war crimes.

We congratulate France on its commitment to develop a code of conduct with a view to restricting the use of the veto. We, along with other States and civil society actors, continue to support that initiative. The veto is both a privilege and a responsibility. It must not be used to prolong and legitimize human suffering.

One important incentive for conflict parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarin law is the prospect of accountability. Those responsible for war crimes must be brought to justice. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) sends a clear message and states specifically that willfully impeding relief supplies may constitute a war crime. Ratification of the Rome Statute remains the ultimate expression of commitment to respecting international humanitarian law and ensuring accountability. It does not mean that the ICC should or can deal with all serious crimes in any given situation, but it is a manifestation of the State's commitment to hold perpetrators to account or, should that not be possible, to transfer them to an international judicial institution.

Until such time as the Rome Statute system has reached universality, the Security Council has a crucial role to play in triggering the Court's jurisdiction, and thereby realizing its full deterrent effect. More than a year ago, 58 States requested the Council to refer the situation in Syria to the ICC — a call that still remains unanswered today. The repeated expression of interest of the Syrian opposition to submit to the jurisdiction of the ICC gives some hope that accountability will not fall off the table.

As we know by now, from many years of experience, accountability needs to be pursued through a range of measures that go far beyond criminal proceedings against particular individuals. Efforts must be made to preserve the rights and dignity of endless numbers of victims, to fight impunity on a larger scale, to help establish a common historical narrative and to lay the building blocks for long-term reconciliation.

As stated by the Secretary-General, accountability encompasses the political, legal and moral responsibility of individuals and institutions for past violations. Such responsibility can be upheld only where the activities of conflict parties are monitored, thereby propelling decision-makers to act. Conflict parties engaging in casualty tracking can also help to foster accountability. Furthermore, the United Nations "Rights up front" approach is an important new development in that regard, as is the undertaking of civilian casualty recording.

My delegation agrees with the Secretary-General that peacekeeping remains an important tool in protecting civilians and that sustained efforts to provide missions with sufficient resources and capabilities are essential to achieving that goal. We must also ensure that all individual protection components of mission mandates are fully implemented.

Through resolution 2100 (2013), on the situation in Mali, the Security Council requested the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali to support the efforts of national authorities and the ICC to bring to justice those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. We encourage the creation of an inter-agency task force to deal with that and other matters related to international criminal justice.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and for convening this debate.

United Nations peacekeeping missions embody the most noble of our collective security responsibilities. Whether Caucasian, African, Asian or Arab, all peacekeepers are united in our common cause to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security. However, while nine peacekeeping operations are currently deployed with mandates on the protection of civilians, the latest report by the Secretary General (S/2013/689) indicates that the current state of the protection of civilians leaves little room for optimism.

My delegation is concerned that the practice of protecting civilians in the field may not be able to catch up with how the international community envisions taking that process forward. Our expectations are unreachable, while our efforts remain rudimentary. We feel that there is a need to take stock of the lessons learned, given the lack of success in establishing an effective regime for the protection of civilians.

Malaysia is all too aware of the complexities involved in protecting civilians in conflict areas. Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and Force Commanders of United Nations missions are facing intricate and unique challenges. Nevertheless, Malaysia sees the protection of civilians as a fundamental component of peacekeeping operations.

In that regard, my delegation wishes to underscore the proposal of the Secretary-General, contained in his report, on the recommendation of a mechanism to record and track civilian casualties. Such a mechanism not only warrants our attention, given the need to protect civilians from harm, but can also be an instrument to guide United Nations missions in taking proactive and preventive measures to reduce the number of civilian casualties in conflict areas.

As the Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security, it should also be kept abreast of the latest developments in the field. We believe more efforts should be made by the leadership of United Nations peacekeeping missions to brief the Council in a more timely and frequent manner. That would enable continued engagement between the Council and the field on developments, progress and prioritization in the implementation of protection of civilians mandates.

My delegation also sees the merit of proper policy planning and preparedness in peacekeeping missions. When undertaking a protection-of-civilians mandate, peacekeeping missions must consider implementing that mandate through an integrated approach. Military and police units, along with United Nations agencies, cannot work in silos.

An integrated apporach to peacekeeping would need to be balanced between instilling peace and security and seeding economic growth and development in the host country. The Council, in collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Peacebuilding Commission, should capitalize on the synergies between those two important mechanisms, each with important roles in instituting good governance and economic growth.

We also believe that there must be effective coordination so as to provide a platform for interaction and the sharing of information, based on expertise and priorities set by the Council. In that regard, Malaysia welcomes the formulation of a comprehensive protection strategy for the implementation of the civilian protection mandates of four United Nations peacekeeping missions.

We are equally pleased to note that the Office of the Military Adviser is also finalizing the drafting of baseline guidance on the protection of civilians. We believe that those developments will improve inter-agency coordination and communications and eliminate gaps in carrying out protection mandates.

Training is the cornerstone for ensuring the standardization of the work of peacekeeping missions in protecting civilians. Peacekeepers and civilian personnel must be trained through a common protection-of-civilians module prior to deployment. We believe efforts should also be made to include substantial elements on the religious and cultural sensitivities of the local people in the common training module for United Nations peacekeepers. The significance of respecting cultural sensitivities and their impact on relations between peacekeepers and the local community must not be underestimated.

Giving due importance to training and exposure, the Government of Malaysia, with the support of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, hosted a training course on the protection of civilians at the Malaysian Peacekeeping Training Centre in Port Dickson from 9 to 13 September 2013. Malaysia expresses its appreciation to the United Nations mobile training team that was tasked to conduct the module for 26 international and Malaysian military officers. The training module included mission-specific scenarios based on incidents faced during United Nations missions. We believe that such training can benefit host countries and peacekeepers alike.

The experiences accumulated by the various United Nations missions are unique and often result from custom-tailoring efforts in the implementation of mandates. Those experiences should be shared with Member States and other United Nations missions. My delegation believes that such exchanges of experience can be carried out through the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the Peacebuilding Commission. We furthermore believe that such measures would improve awareness and generate a common understanding of the protection of civilians.

To conclude, peacekeeping remains the only feasible instrument to protect civilians caught up in armed conflict. In order to improve the status of the protection of civilians in conflict areas, we must ensure that peacekeeping remains an effective tool and diplomatic instrument. That requires commitment, resources and coordination by leaders of peacekeeping missions, host Governments and civilians in the field. My delegation would like to underscore the importance of unanimous action by the Security Council to develop a framework to ensure the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We need to ensure that the United Nations is always endowed with the resources necessary to implement protection-of-civilians mandates effectively.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Khalil (Egypt): I would like, first, to congratulate the delegation of Lithuania and you personally, Madam President, for assuming the presidency of the Council. I would also like to thank you, Madam, for organizing today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his tenth report on the subject (S/2013/689), and to express our appreciation to Ms. Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs; Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; and Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their informative briefings.

Despite the fact that this year marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Security Council's engagement in the protection of civilians in armed conflict by giving peacekeeping operations explicit protection mandates, civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in current armed conflicts. They continue to be subjected to indiscriminate attacks and other forms of violence by parties to conflict. The targeting of civilians because of their religion or ethnic or tribal affiliation in the Central African Republic and South Sudan is very alarming. Civilians are still suffering in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite the robust peacekeeping mandate that has been given to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The situations in Syria and the occupied territories are clear reminders of the tragedies civilians endure on a daily basis. All that underlines the fact that United Nations bodies, especially the Security Council, should adopt more effective measures in that regard.

I would also like to thank the delegation of Lithuania for the excellent concept note (S/2014/74, annex) it has prepared and its suggestion that we focus today's debate on the protection of civilians through United Nations peacekeeping missions. The contribution of peacekeeping missions to the protection of civilians in armed conflict is extremely important. We support providing missions with the necessary mandates, personnel and equipment to enable them to become effective mechanisms for early warning when violations occur. Developing a comprehensive framework for the future work of United Nations peacekeeping missions so as to ensure the protection of civilians and accountability for any violations that occur during the implementation of their mandates is essential to achieving a common and effective understanding regarding the protection of civilians.

We stress that United Nations peacekeeping missions should uphold the principles of respect for the sovereignty and cultural specificities of host countries. The protection of civilians under imminent threat of physical violence in any armed conflict is the primary responsibility of the host country of any peacekeeping operation. Peacekeeping missions with protection mandates should conduct their tasks without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the host Government in that regard.

The successful conduct of tasks relating to the protection of civilians, wherever a United Nations mandate exists, requires a holistic approach that encompasses the provision of timely and adequate resources, logistical support and the required training, in addition to clearly defined and achievable mandates. The consent of the host State as a fundamental principle of peacekeeping must be respected. That requires open and regular political discussions between senior mission leadership and national authorities, as well as effective follow-up on how to implement all mandated tasks, including, of course, the protection of civilians. Existing legal challenges in identifying who are the civilians whom peacekeepers should protect and how to differentiate them from insurgents in some areas of operations should also be addressed.

As a major troop-contributing country, Egypt has always stressed the need to establish high standards of conduct on the part of peacekeepers. We provide mandatory predeployment training for all our military and police personnel, including training on the protection of civilians according to United Nations standards.

The recent report of the Secretary-General reiterated the need for compliance with the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law by States and armed groups involved in armed conflict. We believe that all parties, in particular States, must comply with the principles of distinction and proportionality in armed conflicts. All parties must refrain from targeting medical facilities and grant access to those providing humanitarian assistance. Peacekeeping missions should consider tracking and reporting any violations.

Egypt also supports what the report has called for regarding the need to act consistently across all relevant situations, considering that, without such consistency, there will be a significant gap between the commitments undertaken by the Security Council in the abstract and the actual performance of the Council in responding to violence against civilians in armed conflicts, when performance matters most.

We share the concerns expressed in the Secretary-General's report about the increasing use of drones and unmanned aerial vehicles, and its implications on the nature of conflicts and the negative impact on civilians and accountability. The international community, in particular the Security Council, has to ensure rapid and effective accountability for any violations against civilians in armed conflicts. The establishment of international and national commissions of inquiry into such violations has proved to be an effective tool.

We call on the Security Council and the United Nations bodies concerned to take decisive actions to stop the indiscriminate attacks against civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories and to lift the unjust blockade imposed by the Israeli authorities on the Gaza Strip. We remind Israel of its clear obligations under international law and international humanitarian law in that respect and its primary responsibility, as the occupying Power, for the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Egypt, for its part, is doing everything possible to alleviate the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip by opening the Rafah crossing whenever possible, despite the security challenges that we face in the Sinai.

Finally, we look forward, in future, to greater attention and a broader discussion, including with troop-contributing countries, be devoted to the emerging challenges linked with the protection of civilians during armed conflicts, in addition to the current core challenges identified in the Secretary-General's report.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Greece.

Mr. Spinellis (Greece): I, too, would like to thank the Lithuanian presidency for organizing this timely and important debate.

More often than not, civilians constitute the bulk of the victims of armed conflicts around the world. Although, at the normative level, significant progress has been made over the past decade to enhance the protection of civilians, the same progress has not been reflected on the ground. Security Council resolutions and the Secretary-General's reports, although unanimously adopted and endorsed by Member States, lack the required implementation in the field. A more efficient and better coordinated protection effort is needed in order for the necessary level of protection to be reached.

Enhancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict is one of the core responsibilities of the Security Council,. Although the main responsibility lies in the hands of the parties involved in a conflict, the protection of human dignity, along with the consolidation of human rights, is the responsibility of all Member States.

The use of new weapon technologies is a new threat to civilians and, at the same time, raises questions about the compliance of those weapons with the rules of distinction, proportionality and precaution set out in international human rights law and international humanitarian law. However, that same technology is capable of facilitating the tracking and recording of civilian casualties, while contributing to easing civilian suffering and pain and to bringing perpetrators to justice. Humanitarian access and the relevant corridors, whenever feasible, should remain unimpeded.

On another note, attacks against journalists and media personnel covering armed conflicts continue to increase. Local journalists account for the majority of victims, and female journalists are routinely targeted. Combating impunity will undoubtedly decrease the deaths, including among journalists working under dangerous conditions.

Moreover, the role of journalists in conflicts is further expanding, as they remain in the field from the very beginning until the end of peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. Besides, journalists' role in reporting on conflict is dependent upon their ability to provide independent and fair coverage of all sides. However, with a changing media landscape that relies increasingly on freelancers, Internet journalists and social media, conflict journalists and their work are becoming progressively more vulnerable.

My delegation shares the view that the protection of civilians should include, in all its aspects, the component of the protection of journalists in an effort to introduce this dimension into the peacekeeping and peacebuilding stages through a comprehensive approach in which training plays a crucial role. Training is a fundamental pillar, and Greece is contributing to that effort by supporting training initiatives to develop safety and security for civilians, peacekeepers and United Nations staff in the field.

In that vein, we also welcome the presentation provided on the protection of civilians in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, and we note the attention given by the Special Committee and its sensitivity to the issue of the protection of civilians.

The protection of civilians remains a serious challenge for the international community, but we cannot allow ourselves to fail.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Sajdik (Austria): Let me start by thanking Lithuania for convening this important debate and by expressing our appreciation for the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2014/3.

Austria aligns itself with the statements to be delivered on behalf of the European Union, the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians and the Human Security Network.

In the interest of time, I will read out a shortened version of my statement.

Fifteen years after the adoption in 1999 of the first Security Council resolution mandating a United Nations peacekeeping operation with the task of the protection of civilians (resolution 1270 (1999)), peacekeeping operations with protection-of-civilians mandates are now the rule rather than the exception. Significant progress has been made over the recent years in implementing resolution 1894 (2009) with a view to strengthening protection on the ground. The work of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has contributed to an enhanced understanding of protection-of-civilians activities among all the relevant actors.

Other requests still need to be fully implemented. In resolution 1894 (2009) and the presidential statement adopted exactly one year ago (S/PRST/2013/2), the Council reaffirmed its practice of requiring mission-specific benchmarks in order to measure and review the implementation of peacekeeping mandates, and we hope for more information in the Secretary-General's reports in that regard. Concerning the use of targeted sanctions and the designation of individuals or groups committing violations of international humanitarian or human rights law, we call on the Council to ensure a more coherent practice by sanctions regimes that have listing criteria linked to such violations.

In order to complement the United Nations work on protection-of-civilians training modules with national efforts to better prepare peacekeeping personnel, Austria has developed an interdisciplinary training course on the protection of civilians that is open to national and international participation by senior decision-makers in the armed forces, police, civilian administration and other civilian stakeholders and experts. In addition, Austria continues its cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and will, for the second time this year, host a United Nations training course on the protection of civilians for United Nations peacekeeping personnel. Furthermore, Austria stands ready to support the work of mobile training teams on the protection of civilians with an Austrian expert.

We commend the Secretariat's efforts, including the Chatham House seminar organized by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs last year, to raise awareness about the devastating humanitarian consequences of explosive weapons for civilians and to restrict their use in populated areas, where they cause indiscriminate harm. Austria welcomes the Secretary-General's recommendation to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and the Secretariat's efforts to develop practical measures and guidance to reduce their humanitarian impact. We stand ready to assist in those endeavours.

Arms technology is undergoing rapid changes. We fully support the Secretary-General's call on Member States to ensure that attacks by armed drones fully comply with international law. Unfortunately, the circumstances of such attacks all too often lack transparency, which in turn results in limited accountability and limited or absent avenues for the victims of such attacks to seek redress.

In a not-too-distant future, fully autonomous weapon systems might become available. The implications of those developments on the implementation of international humanitarian law require a truly urgent engagement by the relevant United Nations forums, as well as further discussions.

Finally, parties to conflict have to take all feasible measures to mitigate civilian harm resulting from their operations. Innovative mechanisms have been created by the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and the African Union Mission in Somalia. The same is expected where United Nations peacekeeping missions are authorized to carry out targeted offensive operations. The provision in resolution 2098 (2013) relating to MONUSCO's Intervention Brigade to take into account "the need to protect civilians and mitigate risk before, during and after any military operation" is a welcome step in the right direction. We welcome the Secretary-General's recommendation for a common United Nations system to systematically record civilian casualties, and we look forward to receiving an update on those efforts.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Vrailas: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its States members. The candidate countries Turkey and Montenegro; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Albania; as well as the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I shall deliver a shortened version of my statement, the full version of which will be circulated in the Chamber and be made available on our website.

I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the representatives of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the International Committee of the Red Cross for their briefings. I also thank the Lithuanian presidency for organizing this timely debate.

Let me start by stating that the EU continues to be concerned about the heavy civilian casualties, massive displacement of populations, serious human rights violations and worsening of the humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic. In that context, the EU is currently drawing up support for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights so that human rights monitors can be deployed. We welcome the recent appointment of the members of the commission of inquiry and encourage the United Nations to swiftly deploy it on the ground. We look forward to working with the United Nations, the African Union and other actors in ensuring the complementarities of ongoing initiatives.

A more robust response to the crisis is urgently needed. For its part, the European Union has responded swiftly through a combination of humanitarian, stabilization and development support. The European Commission has increased its allocation up to €39 million and has furthermore substantially scaled up its humanitarian engagement, moving to a collective contribution by the EU and its member States of €76 million by the end of 2013. The EU has been fully mobilized since the beginning of the crisis to support the efforts of our African partners.

As authorized by the Council, the EU is committed to sending a crisis management mission in order to help provide a safe and secure environment, protect civilians in the Bangui area and permit internally displaced persons to return to their homes, as well as to create the conditions for humanitarian actors to operate freely. The European Union thanks the Council for adopting resolution 2134 (2014), which authorizes that action.

With regard to the situation in Syria, the EU remains gravely concerned about the continuing and indiscriminate bloodshed among the civilian population and calls for the cessation of all violence so as to allow urgent humanitarian access on the ground. It strongly condemns the regime's escalating and indiscriminate attacks, including the use of Scud missiles, barrel bombs and air and artillery strikes, and its brutality on the ground, notably in Aleppo. The regime bears the primary responsibility for the conflict. Its actions on the ground are undermining the potential for genuine political transition and are fuelling extremism.

We call on all parties to the conflict to immediately uphold their obligation to protect civilians, as well as medical personnel, facilities and transport, to allow and facilitate immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access to the whole of the territory and to guarantee, without delay, the safety and security of humanitarian personnel in the exercise of their duties. The EU will continue to defend human rights and will remain active in ensuring accountability for the widespread and systematic violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law perpetrated in Syria.

The EU reiterates its call on the Security Council to urgently address the situation in Syria with regard to those aspects, including a possible referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC), as requested in the Swiss letter to the Security Council of 14 January 2013. The EU recalls that all those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes must be held accountable. We reaffirm our support for the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, established by the Human Rights Council.

The annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2013/245) reminds us of the challenges ahead. We have seen progress in some areas. However, children in too many countries are suffering terribly as a result of armed conflict. The situation in Syria is of special and most urgent concern. The EU reiterates its call in support of the "No Lost Generation" strategy for the children of Syria. The difficult situation of children in Mali and the Central

African Republic is also highlighted in the Secretary-General's report.

Strengthening accountability is an important element in enhancing compliance by parties to armed conflict with their international obligations. National authorities have the primary responsibility to provide accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. In cases where the national authorities fail to take the necessary steps to ensure accountability, the Security Council can, as appropriate, play a more proactive role.

The ICC continues to play a crucial role in fighting impunity. Serious crimes of international concern should be dealt with by national judicial systems but, when they are unwilling or unable to do so, States parties to the Rome Statute should consider referring those situations to the ICC. Further institutional dialogue between the ICC and the Security Council and the effective follow-up of referrals made by the Security Council to the ICC could assist in ensuring accountability.

In addition to bringing perpetrators to justice, we strongly believe in early and decisive action to try to prevent such crimes from being committed and in the need to forcefully remind the authorities responsible of their primary responsibility to protect civilians, or be held to account. There is much room for improvement, including in the way in which the United Nations system responds to early warnings and evolving situations. The EU welcomes the Secretary-General's "Rights up front" initiative as an important element of the Organization's efforts to strengthen early warning and prevent atrocities against civilians.

For a number of years, the mandates of many peacekeeping and other missions have included protection-of-civilians activities. Many challenges remain in terms of the effective implementation of those protection mandates, and we need to continue to address them. The implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates requires better planning support to missions, gleaning the lessons learned effectively and improving understanding of how to support host States in protecting civilians.

The EU also welcomes the use of new technology in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which supports the delivery of its protection mandate. We encourage the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to further explore opportunities to use state-of-the-art technology in peacekeeping missions.

In many ways, training is the cornerstone for improving the implementation of the protection of civilians by missions. For its part, in Somalia, the EU has provided training to Somali soldiers, with the prevention of the perpetration of war crimes and other premeditated acts of violence against civilians, human rights law and international humanitarian law, among other elements, as an integral part. In future, the European Union Training Mission in Somalia will also provide strategic advice to the General Staff in Mogadishu on designing and developing training concepts, policies and programmes.

With the aim of assisting Malian authorities in consolidating peace and security and, more generally, in order to find lasting solutions to the crisis in the Sahel region, in close coordination with other regional and international stakeholders, from the beginning the EU Training Mission in Mali has been incorporating the issues of the protection of civilians, human rights and gender in the training curriculum.

The EU civilian mission launched at the request of Niger's Government in the summer of 2012 aims, in part, at strengthening the rule of law by developing criminal investigation capacities and ensuring respect for the criminal justice system.

Let me end by saying that the Security Council should continue to request the Secretary-General to explicitly report on the implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates by peacekeeping operations. The protection of civilians should also be a standard benchmark against which we measure the success of peacekeeping operations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Masood Khan (Pakistan): Let me congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the Council presidency for this month and for scheduling several open meetings, such as today's on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), nearly 15 years ago, the protection of civilians under the imminent threat of violence has become an integral part of United Nations peacekeeping mandates and a core function for more than 95 per cent of the current peacekeeping deployments. Today's briefings addressed protection issues from the peacekeeping, human rights and humanitarian angles, thereby giving us a broader picture of both challenges and opportunities.

By now, the protection of civilians within the context of peacekeeping is a widely recognized norm. We need to continue to work on the implementatin of mandates and to refine them by focusing on the consolidation and strengthening of the relevant frameworks and mechanisms, compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law by all sides, humanitarian access and accountability.

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of wars and conflicts. What is euphemistically called "collateral damage" results in civilian deaths, injury and displacement. Women and children become the primary victims of violence and brutalization during conflicts.

We have done relatively better in situations where the United Nations and the Security Council have invested political and diplomatic capital and have deployed peacekeeping resources. Pakistan fully supports the protection of civilians in armed conflict and, as part of many United Nations peacekeeping missions, we have contributed to the efforts to achieve that objective. Today, peacekeepers are tasked with protection-of-civilians mandates in increasingly complex and volatile situations. They are also mandated to do much more work without the provision of adequate resources.

That reality on the ground has two direct negative consequences: unmet expectations and heightened concerns about the safety and security of United Nations personnel. Both are evident in the recent experiences in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. Recent briefings in the Committee of 34, as well as the statements made today, affirm that there are limits to which peacekeeping missions can fulfil their protection mandates within their respective areas of operation, configurations and available resources. We should incorporate lessons learned into the planning and assessment stages that lead to the authorization of the relevant mandates and resources by the Council. A capability-driven approach, if pursued earnestly, enhances the effectiveness of protection mandates. Credible and feasible rapid-reaction capacities are important, as are, increasingly, new technologies that augment the situational awareness and operational capability of missions. It goes without saying that the mission leadership is crucial throughout the entire process. As indicated by other speakers, consultations with troop-contributing countries are essential in the formulation of changes in mandates and in all phases of peacekeeping operations.

Despite the varying views regarding robust peacekeeping, the consensus remains strong around the basic principles of peacekeeping. While peacekeepers cannot be passive bystanders, they should not be perceived as partisan. That is why the neutrality and universal character of United Nations peacekeeping activities are so important. Our experience has shown that a proactive stance in implementing protection mandates — such as through effective and frequent patrolling, disarmament and demobilization — serves as a credible deterrent and, in many situations, obviates the need for the use of force.

Lastly, aklthough peacekeeping missions are there to assist, the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians remains with the host country. Peacekeeping missions cannot become an arm of a country's national defence force. It is therefore important to continue to build national capacities in the rule of law and to bolster security institutions, even as peacekeepers are deployed in a country.

A clear distinction must also be made, as Under-Secretary-General Ladsous advised us today, between the protection of civilians and the responsibility to protect. The conflation of the two concepts creates legal confusion. International consensus and legal opinion support the view that for the protection-of-civilians agenda, international humanitarian law covers only situations of armed conflict. That consensus must be respected. The mandate and discussion on that item in the Council are also limited to situations of armed conflict, especially those on the agenda of the Council. That distinction must be maintained to avoid the frequent drift into reporting about situations that do not come under the purview of armed conflicts as recognized by international law.

In his latest report (S/2013/689) on the protection of civilians, the Secretary-General draw attention to the use of armed drones in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the occupied Palestinian territory. In that context, he raises concerns regarding compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, in particular the rules of distinction, proportionality and precaution. The Secretary-General also underlines the related aspects of the investigation of drone attacks, transparency, accountability and the ability of victims to seek redress. The Secretary-General also raises concerns about the impact of armed drones on individuals, children, families and communities in areas of Pakistan. Those concerns include the interruption in the education of children, the undermining of religious and cultural practices and the fear of being caught in secondary strikes.

Drone strikes have violated Pakistan's sovereignty, killed hundreds of civilians — men, women and children — and radicalized more people. The use of drones has therefore been counterproductive. In the past month or so, there has been a pause in drone strikes. That has given some respite to civilians in the areas affected. What we have called for and continue to call for is a cessation in the use of armed drones.

We support the presidential statement on the protection of civilians adopted today (S/PRST/2014/3) and, finally, we pay tribute to peacekeepers and humanitarian actors in the field who, under very difficult circumstances, are trying to protect civilians.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Adi (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to express our congratulations to you, Madam, on your country's accession to the presidency of the Security Council for the present month. I also thank your delegation for the initiative of convening this important meeting.

This year coincides with the one-hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, a war that underscored the importance of creating an international body responsible for maintaining international peace and security. Following the failure of the League of Nations to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War, the United Nations was established, giving the peoples of the world renewed hope that this Organization, entrusted with the fundamental mandate of maintaining international peace and security and saving humankind from the scourge of war, would succeed. Although the Organization has to date succeeded in avoiding the outbreak of another world war, it has not been able to put an end to war or to the suffering of humankind.

Despite the fact that 15 years have passed since the Security Council first debated this item, namely, the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in a series of annual debates, practical experience has regrettably proved that the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict clearly continues to be used selectively. It has been repeatedly exploited in the service of agendas that contravene the most fundamental norms of international law.

My delegation has read the concept note (S/2014/74, annex) presented by your delegation, Madam President, to guide today's discussion. We should like to underline the following fundamental points.

First, preventative action — to prevent the outbreak of conflict and seek the rapid and peaceful settlement of crises — is the ideal means to protect civilians and avoid the scourge of war.

Secondly, the fundamental responsibility for the protection of civilians from any threat they may face, including the responsibility to protect them from terrorist acts, falls within the purview of the State concerned; it is the only actor mandated to maintain security and stability on its territory.

Thirdly, the issue of protecting civilians in armed conflict cannot be settled except through full commitment to the principles of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, foremost among them the principles of the sovereign equality of States and non-interference in internal affairs.

Fourthly, it is utterly unacceptable for the topic of the protection of civilians to be taken up in an opportunistic manner, thus rendering it a tool to serve the political objectives and interests of influential States. The exploitation by some Member States of the issue of the protection of civilians, both within the Security Council and beyond, and the application of selective policies and double standards will only further detract from the role entrusted to the Security Council in the Charter.

Fifthly, the issue of the protection of civilians must be dealt with in a comprehensive manner that addresses any type of harm done to civilians, including unilateral coercive measures imposed by some States on the peoples of other States, thereby exposing them to suffering and a slow death by depriving them of daily necessities — including food, medicine and fuel — actions that the United Nations has stressed are illegitimate.

My delegation stresses the need to provide protection to civilians under Israeli occupation in the occupied Syrian Golan and the other occupied Arab territories, and to put an end to the practices of the aggressive Israeli occupying authorities against them, with a view to ending the occupation. The Council's silence in the face of Israel's violations of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law has led Israel to believe that it is above accountability, and it has therefore persisted in its aggressive policies, threatening international peace and security and undermining the principles and rules of international law.

It is regrettable that some States have once again exploited this meeting to reiterate their allegations relating to the situation in my country, in order to disrupt the ongoing developments with regard to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the ongoing Geneva II talks. Despite our objection to such methods, we stress that the Syrian Government is more concerned than anyone else for its own people. It is carrying out its constitutional duty to restore security and stability and to protect our people from the terrorism that is targeting the Syrian State and the Syrian people.

In this regard, we call on the Security Council once again to shoulder its responsibilities to condemn the terrorism being carried out against Syrians and to hold accountable those States that provide weapons, money, training and safe haven to the armed terrorist groups that cross borders in flagrant violation of all international instruments and resolutions on counter-terrorism, and to make those States withdraw their mercenaries from Syrian territories and stop attempting to foil all efforts to reach a political settlement of the Syrian crisis, through dialogue, in a way that will allow the Syrian people to decide their own fate, free from agendas of extremism, terrorism and violence.

Finally, we find it very bizarre that the representative of Israel would speak about the need for an intervention by the United Nations in order to protect Syrians, while Israel has continued for 60 years to occupy Arab territories and to violate the most fundamental rights of Arab peoples under this occupation. The call on the United Nations to intervene in order to protect civilians and those under Israeli occupation has been, and continues to be, at the very heart of the statements by many Member States, particularly under the item that we are debating today. This call has always been met with violations on a larger scale, in terms of continuing the occupation, expanding settlements and ignoring the legitimate rights of peoples under Israeli occupation.

Let me recall here that Syria has always believed in the central role of the United Nations in international relations, as evidenced by Syria's cooperation with the United Nations and its specialized entities during the current crisis in the country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Wittig (Germany): Germany aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians.

The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2014/689), for which we thank him, provides us with a sad truth: the situation of civilians has worsened in most armed conflicts. It is appalling to see that terrorizing the civilian population has become an integral part of the military strategies of many parties to conflict.

In Syria, in the Central African Republic, in South Sudan and in many other conflicts, we are confronted daily with abominable violence against civilians. In Syria alone, more than 10,000 children have already died in the conflict.

Although the responsibility for those atrocities lies with the parties to conflict, the international community needs to do its utmost to improve the protection of civilians in all situations of conflict. The genocide in Rwanda 20 years ago is a constant reminder of that obligation.

On Red Hand Day, let me recall that those who are traditionally the most vulnerable members of society, women and children, deserve our special attention and protection.

We therefore welcome actions such as taken by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to break the cycle of violence, rape and death affecting thousands of civilians and in particular women and children. While the situation on the ground remains volatile, we also commend the role of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan in providing shelter and protection to more than 70,000 internally displaced persons in South Sudan. It is essential that we build on those examples.

We strongly support the Secretary-General's "Rights up front" initiative and call for its swift implementation. The initiative, if taken seriously, has the potential not only to help peacekeeping missions to better protect civilians, but also to place the overall goal of protecting people at the centre of the Organization's policies throughout the system. The implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions, particularly concerning the need for protection against sexual violence in conflict, is equally important in this context.

We have seen how illegal and irresponsible transfers of weapons can contribute to increased instability, exacerbated conflicts, atrocities, human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law. We therefore welcome the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) as the first treaty that addresses those risks at a global level by establishing clear and legally binding criteria, also with regard to international humanitarian law. The ATT needs to be swiftly signed, ratified and fully implemented on a global scale.

What else can we do? In his recent reports, the Secretary-General has identified a number of challenges, some of which I would like to briefly touch upon.

First, we need to ensure that those responsible for grave breaches of international humanitarian law, in particular for war crimes, as well as for violations of human rights, are held accountable. Impunity fosters crime. It is therefore crucial that we further strengthen the International Criminal Court. We urge the Council to insist that Member States cooperate fully with the Court.

Secondly, the arbitrary withholding and denial of humanitarian access in Syria cannot be tolerated. Using starvation as a method of warfare constitutes a war crime. We urge all parties to the conflict in Syria to allow unimpeded humanitarian access to all people affected, as the Council demanded in its presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15).

Since then, the situation of civilians has only worsened, in blatant disregard of the appeals made by Syrians and the international community alike. The Old City of Homs stands as testimony to the fact that the Geneva negotiations cannot in themselves produce even small progress if they are not backed by active international diplomacy.

We look to the Council to follow up on its commitments and ensure that the basic principles of international humanitarian law are upheld in Syria. In that regard, Germany fully supports the Secretary-General's call for a strong humanitarian resolution.

Finally, as witnessed in Syria and beyond, indiscriminate attacks against civilians using explosive weapons with wide impact in densely populated areas remain

an appalling aspect of conflicts to which the international community has to react. We share the concerns expressed by the Secretary-General in that context and welcome the Secretariat's continued engagement with Member States and others to raise awareness of the issue and to provide further guidance on the matter.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Sinhaseni (Thailand): At the outset, let me congratulate Lithuania on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of February. We offer our thanks and congratulations to the Lithuanian delegation for placing this important item on the agenda and for the comprehensive concept note (S/2014/74, annex) it prepared, which outlines key elements for the discussion today. We also thank the Secretary-General for his substantive report on the issue (S/2013/689), as well as the briefers for the information and insights they have again imparted.

As a member of the Human Security Network, Thailand aligns itself with the statement to be delivered this afternoon on behalf of the Network by the representative of Slovenia.

For a number of years, we have discussed in this Chamber the subject of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. A number of Security Council resolutions and presidential statements on the issue have been adopted. Yet, regrettably, we still see today an alarming number of civilian casualties, including, unfortunately, women and children, in many areas plagued with armed conflict.

Since today's debate focuses on enhancing the protection offered by United Nations peacekeeping missions, which is one of the five core challenges to the protection of civilians highlighted by the Secretary-General, I shall keep my statement within that scope.

First, the following principles are now well established. It is the State that has the primary responsibility to protect its citizens. All parties to armed conflict must honour and strictly comply with their obligations under international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law. Leaders of peacekeeping missions with protection mandates need to understand clearly their mandates and priorities derived from the relevant Security Council resolutions. Likewise, military and police personnel and other troop components at all levels in the chain of command need to be fully informed and understand their mandates and responsibilities. It is therefore essential that Member States and the United Nations work closely to ensure that those key elements are communicated to, received and implemented by all those involved in such missions.

Secondly, it is essential that there be a common understanding of peacekeeping mission protection mandates by the relevant actors, namely, host countries, troop- and police-contributing countries, parties to the conflict, military and police personnel and other protection actors. A clear and comprehensive United Nations policy guidance codifying protection-of-civilians mandates needs to be developed and revised as needed. The guidance can be developed through an exchange of information, experiences, best practices and lessons learned among peacekeepers in the field, the Secretariat, troop- and police-contributing countries, host Governments and other actors. With that type of clear guidance, a mission's planning process, strategy development and translation into systematic operation on the ground can be more effective. In turn, the mission's ability to protect civilians will be enhanced and be more effective.

Thirdly, intensive predeployment and periodic in-mission training, both on operational tasks and other protection-related elements, is vital. Those elements include, inter alia, international law, gender-based issues and cultural sensitivity. Tailor-made training courses for military, police and civilian personnel in response to different situations on the ground also need to be developed through close consultations and collaboration between the United Nations and the contributing countries.

Fourthly, peacekeeping missions with protection-of-civilians mandates are often conducted with insufficient resources or with a lack of capacity or both, which ultimately compromises their operational ability to protect civilians. Therefore, the assessment of threats to civilians must be incorporated into any mission strategy, structure and resources before mandating missions, so that they can be designed properly and resources allocated accordingly.

My delegation supports the Secretary-General, who, in his report, states that the informal expert group on the protection of civilians is a valuable forum that can provide the Council with information, analysis and options on situations involving serious protection concerns. The Council should consider making full use of that body.

The protection of civilians is an important task that allows for no compromise, so when the Council gives missions the protection mandate and if we expect them to perform their duties successfully, we must do our utmost to support them. We must provide them with adequate resources and equip them with the necessary capacities.

In conclusion, I wish to thank and congratulate Lithuania once again for continuing to focus attention on this important issue. Let me reiterate that, in Thailand's view, durable peace is not tenable if civilians lack security and are not safe. Furthermore, attacks on civilians, whether deliberate or indiscriminate, are unacceptable. Those who commit such crimes must be held accountable.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Ružička (Slovakia): We salute the initiative of the Lithuanian presidency to bring this important topic, highlighted by the recent crises in Syria, the Central African Republic, Mali and other countries, to our attention. It is worth noting the symbolism of holding our discussions today on the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers. Slovakia would like to express its appreciation for the work of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos, High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous and Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross Yves Daccord.

At the outset, I would like to align myself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

The protection of peace and the prevention of war are among the most important objectives of the United Nations. Not long ago, we discussed in this Chamber the lessons of war and the search for a permanent peace in post-conflict areas (see S/PV.7105). In today's discussion we tackle another question: how to achieve substantial progress in two equally important tasks — the prevention of war and the protection of civilians once a conflict breaks out.

In the event that we fail to prevent wars or conflicts, we must combine our efforts, capacities, means and resources to protect those who are most vulnerable, namely, women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities. Those groups are always the easiest targets in conflict situations and the most likely victims. But we should ask ourselves: can we take immediate and well-focused action to ease suffering and provide effective assistance? Can we protect volunteers, United Nations employees and other dedicated women and men who are providing or trying to provide humanitarian assistance and relief, often putting their own lives in danger? What is the price of overcoming political divergences, national interests and global objectives in situations where we see millions of people suffering, when they are internally displaced, forced to flee their homes or killed in military action? How do we protect children recruited to fight, women used as human shields, girls who are being sexually abused?

Blue Helmets and United Nations symbols are, perhaps more often than we think, the only safe haven they can hope for. By failing to take decisive action, we betray those hopes, the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the essence of humanity. But above all, we betray ourselves.

The number of civilian casualties in current conflicts is extremely disturbing. According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/689), 1.1 million people remain displaced in Somalia. More than 2.6 million have been internally displaced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Civilians are also targeted in other conflict and post-conflict zones, such as Mali, Yemen, the Sudan and South Sudan. In those conflicts, even United Nations peacekeepers have been under attack.

In the Central African Republic, it was probably only the swift action of the Security Council that prevented the worst-case scenario from occurring. Nevertheless, more than 1 million people have been forced from their homes, and the humanitarian situation is alarming. The security situation there is still very fragile and, even with the deployment of European Union forces on the ground in the next few weeks, stabilizing the country will be a challenge. To date, the conflict in Syria has cost 100,000 human lives, and, since March 2011, more than 6.2 million have been internally displaced. More than 9.3 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

Through various channels, Slovakia has, as an emerging donor, helped to lessen the suffering of refugees from Syria and Mali. Last year, we joined the family of donors in the Peacebuilding Fund, which supports countries emerging from conflict.

Since the first peacekeeping operation was mandated to protect civilians in 1999, we have accumulated substantive information about possibilities and limitations. While the Security Council has the key role to mandate peacekeeping operations, we have to face reality and seriously discuss the way forward.

Numerous challenges and shortcomings impede peacekeepers' capacity to effectively protect civilians on the ground. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently acknowledged, the relevant actors continue to struggle over what it means for peacekeeping operations to protect civilians, in both definition and practice. The perennial problem of many operations is summarized very well by the Brahimi report from 2000 (see S/2000/809): peacekeepers may not be able to justifiably use force against attackers in order to protect civilians when they feel morally compelled to do so.

In the world of continuous globalization and growing interdependence between national developments and regional stability, we should look more deeply into the concept of national sovereignty when dealing with internal conflicts and should seek the highest possible international legitimacy for our much needed action.

In that context, the role of an international body for post-conflict justice and for taking action against impunity for crimes against humanity should be reinforced. In many instances, attacks against civilian populations could amount to crimes against humanity or war crimes. It is necessary that the individuals responsible for such crimes be held accountable and tried by an independent and impartial court of law. If authorities at the national level are unwilling or unable to adequately address the issue, the International Criminal Court should step in.

There are many areas in which we may improve the situation of protecting the innocent and vulnerable. Let me mention just a few of them.

First, global adherence to the Geneva Conventions should be improved, especially to the Additional Protocols of 1977, as well as to the protocols prohibiting the use of certain weapons.

Second, we need to accelerate the acceptance of the 2000 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Third, we must improve the ability of national and international units to reach people living in areas affected by conflicts.

Fourth, the safety of humanitarian volunteers and workers when accessing people in need must be improved.

Fifth, a ban on the use of public facilities in war must be fully implemented. It is unacceptable to tolerate the use of civilian facilities such as hospitals or schools as shields or covers for military operations, not to mention using civilians as human shields. We must stand firm against the recruitment of child soldiers.

Six, more effective mechanisms to monitor the use of explosive weapons in heavily populated areas must be created.

Seven, we should concentrate on the elimination of post-conflict effects on the mortality rate of children and women as an indirect cause of war. In ongoing conflicts, men die more frequently in direct armed actions, whereas women die more frequently in the post-conflict period.

Eight, when appropriate and when on-site developments require it, we must consider taking action in the humanitarian field separately from political, security or military decisions.

In conclusion, as a small step for the United Nations but a leap for the Security Council, we commend France for its initiative designed to limit the use of the right of the veto in cases of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity. We suggest that other members of the Council give serious consideration to that initiative.

We welcomed the Secretary-General's proposals for further strengthening United Nations mandates on the protection of civilians, and we call on Security Council members to act consistently across all relevant situations, while using a broad range of tools to improve the actions of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): The Council will not be surprised that Italy aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union and with that by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Nevertheless, we wish to add a few remarks in our national capacity.

The stakes of today's debate could not be higher. The news we hear from several conflict areas is appalling. The involvement of defenceless civilians in armed conflicts seems to have become the rule rather than the exception. Civilians are victims of senseless violence. Neither children nor other vulnerable groups are spared in, for instance, Syria, South Sudan and the Central African Republic from massacres that have ethnic, religious or political motivations. Our first duty is therefore to state loudly and clearly that there can be no justification for those acts and that those responsible, whether individuals or Governments, can be held accountable. The condemnation of the international community and of the United Nations must be unanimous and unequivocal.

The responsibility to protect belongs primarily to States. That is a consolidated principle of international law from which we cannot waver. But there are, unfortunately, far too many situations in the real world where that principle simply does not work because States are too weak or somehow unable to deliver. That is where the United Nations needs to grab hold of the reins, which it can do only if its Members allow it to. Take, for example, the fact that some 75,000 civilians, mostly women and children, are being sheltered in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan camp in Juba. I wonder whether that information is taken into account by the people who so easily criticize this Organization and dismiss its work to mitigate the troubles of the world.

But the protection of civilians in armed conflicts is a relatively new task for the United Nations and its peacekeeping missions. It is a mandate that Italy supports, in the firm belief that, as a world organization, we have a duty to oppose the folly that too often invades the behaviour of human beings. But it is a mandate that requires appropriate tools and fresh thinking about the relationship between peacekeeping and humanitarian actions.

First and foremost, it requires the unity of peoples and nations on the action needed, at least at the humanitarian level. When humanitarian aid is necessary and humanitarian access is requested, we need to think solely about those who are suffering and join forces to provide them with relief.

Secondly, Italy welcomes the most recent developments in peacekeeping operations, notably the introduction of modern technology. The unmanned aerial systems currently used by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo already seem to have significantly improved the situation on the ground and have enabled the Mission to deliver on its mandate to protect civilians. They have also strengthened the security of the peacekeepers themselves. Without ignoring the precautions those tools require, we strongly encourage the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to continue on this path and to explore the possibilities offered by modern technology for the protection of civilians. Even in the most inaccessible and remote areas, new instruments can help us to identify at-risk groups of civilians, to deliver aid and to prevent attacks against them.

Thirdly, it is essential that the Council strengthen coherence in seeking recourse to the International Criminal Court and helping the Court to fulfil its mandate, including by ensuring appropriate follow-up to Security Council referrals. The effective protection of civilians depends on a culture of accountability in all conflict scenarios. To strengthen the protection of civilians, we must make sure the perpetrators of crimes realize that the Council is serious about enforcing individual responsibility for crimes under international law.

Allow me to conclude with a word about the safety of journalists. It is commendable that the Security Council took up the question in an open debate in July (see S/PV.7003). Thanks to journalists, we know when the world's worst brutalities are taking place. We must remain vigilant on the issues. Protecting a free press means protecting free speech, and a free press is what most threatens the perpetrators of crimes against defenceless civilians.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

Mr. McLay (New Zealand): New Zealand applauds the fact the Lithuania continues the tradition of elected Council members paying close attention to the issue of the protection of civilians.

The updated aide-mémoire adopted with today's presidential statement (S/PRST/2014/3) is a useful achievement. But we have to be realistic; it is only a modest step. There are already many generic statements from the Council on the protection issue. New Zealand believes that, at this time, the real challenge is finding ways to mainstream those thematic statements into the real-life situations on the Council's agenda and that we can meet that challenge by carefully assessing where the gaps lie between Council decisions and actual practice, and determining how to fill and close those gaps.

In short, we urge that the effort of those who sit at the Council table be focused on protecting real people in real conflict situations and on achieving results. It only adds to the tragedy in Syria that today we are debating the issue of protection in the abstract, instead of applying the energy of the Council to a real-life protection crisis that calls out for attention — and it is an agonized call, at that.

Moreover, other real life situations demonstrate that conflict can easily re-emerge in countries where there is already a United Nations peacekeeping or special political mission. Experience is showing that such missions need much clearer guidance on fulfilling their protection mandates. Events in South Sudan, with tens of thousands of civilians sheltering in United Nations compounds — the safe haven of the Blue Helmets, of which Slovakia has just spoken — and nearly 1 million people displaced, underline the importance of peacekeeping missions being better prepared and better mandated for implementing practical protection roles.

New Zealand is convinced that protection works best when combined with prevention. That means that the Council must be better informed of emerging protection challenges. Early warning is one element of that. Regular briefings focused on emerging civilian protection challenges should be treated as essential, not just as "nice to have". But having been warned, are we prepared to act? Sometimes, even early warning is not enough. Finding the political will to act is equally critical — in which regard the Council must be congratulated for its prompt action, in December, on South Sudan. But it is worth reflecting on how the protection needs of civilians in the Central African Republic and Mali might have been better achieved if the Council had sent missions to those countries much earlier in the evolution of their conflicts. Similar, lower-level missions were sometimes used in that way to good effect in the past. And they should be used again.

Given its tremendous responsibility to civilian populations in danger — sometimes in mortal danger — capacity bottlenecks in the Council should never become a reason for delaying action. The Council must ask which aspects of its current practice carry the risk of delay, and how they can be remedied, thus allowing it to respond to an emerging threat to civilians, even if it is already dealing with other crises elsewhere.

It may also be that United Nations peacekeepers could be better trained and equipped to fulfil protection-of-civilians mandates. Peacekeepers might need the relevant enablers, including air assets, to enhance situation awareness, mobility and force protection. The finalization by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of tactical-level training material on the protection of civilians is very welcome, and its adoption by training centres and troop-contributing countries will further develop the capacity and capability of peacebuilders and peacekeepers.

But, as we have said previously, in addition to training and resources, actually implementing a protection mandate also requires common political will. Generating that willingness and coordinating protection-of-civilians activities across multidimensional missions is a complex task, and thus New Zealand supports a strong protection-of-civilians coordination capacity.

Like Germany, New Zealand is convinced that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is one of the key factors threatening the safety of civilians — indeed, threatening the safety of the peacekeepers sent to protect them. Peacekeepers should be mandated to assist in tracking illicit transfers of small arms and in implementing restrictions on their movement in their areas of operation. That would have a real impact on the protection environment.

Looking forward, we must acknowledge that, when the protection of civilians fails, all too often that failure is accompanied by grave war crimes and atrocities. As the representative of Italy has just emphasized, where States cannot or do not fulfil their obligations to ensure accountability for breaches of international humanitarian and human rights law, international mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, play an important role in preventing impunity.

As we have seen so recently, there are important questions about when, and in what circumstances, such mechanisms should play their role. Therefore, Madam President, the debate on rule of law, which your country, Lithuania, has scheduled for 19 February, will be an ideal opportunity for the linkage between protection and accountability to be explored. New Zealand will welcome the opportunity to contribute to that discussion as well.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uruguay.

Mr. Koncke Pizzorno (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to congratulate you, Madam President, for convening this open debate and for promoting the adoption of the presidential statement on the protection of civilians (S/PRST/2014/3). Similarly, I wish to thank the speakers who preceded me for their contributions to the debate.

Uruguay aligns with the statement made by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Nevertheless, my delegation would like to make some comments in its national capacity.

We welcome the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/689). Unfortunately, despite the significant progress of recent years — for example, in peacekeeping and peacebuilding, which as a troop-contributing country we can affirm — the civilian population continues to be most affected in armed conflicts, with the highest numbers of victims. The best remedy to that problem should be prevention.

The prevention of massive violations of human rights is indeed a complicated matter. However, the question that arises is whether or not we could do more in that area. The early identification of signs from the field and the prompt sending of appropriate signals to the relevant actors on the obligation to respect the physical and moral integrity of individuals are fundamental. That is a crucial priority aspect that, in the year of the twentieth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, should prompt deep reflection.

Finding a peaceful resolution, inclusive political dialogue, the strengthening of State institutions, and thus of the rule of law, the promotion of sustainable socioeconomic development and reconciliation are inseparable elements of prevention, while at the same time represent fundamental elements for the creation of durable protection environments.

But very often, certainly, prevention efforts are fruitless or they fail. In those cases, it is absolutely necessary to facilitate access by humanitarian personnel and to ensure that all parties involved and in all situations respect international humanitarian law so as to ensure suitable security conditions for the those personnel to perform their tasks. We agree with the Secretary-General on the need to further discuss the issue of arbitrary denial of access to relief operations and the consequences of denial.

Promoting accountability is another basic element in preventing the most serious human rights violations. In that context, the competent organs must consistently make use of the instruments established by the international community, such as the International Criminal Court and the fact-finding mechanisms.

On the other hand, the issue of registering victims is among the areas of emerging attention that could enhance the protection of civilians. We are sensitive to that important activity, which is aligned with the principles of humanitarian law, first in relation to some of the most fundamental values of human dignity, and also because of its potential practical effects, as such a record could shed light on the causes of the harm inflicted on civilians and the necessary measures to stop the harm and prevent its recurrence.

For Uruguay, consultations with the troop-contributing countries participating in peacekeeping operations are of particular importance.

Uruguay has taken note of the unique and exceptional nature of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is reflected in what is also a unique solution, contained in resolution 2098 (2013), through the creation of an Intervention Brigade. It is a solution that goes beyond the traditional concept of peacekeeping operations. In my Government's opinion, such operations must continue to be developed in accordance with the basic principles of the consent of the parties, impartiality and the non-use of force except in cases of legitimate defence and in defence of the mandate.

It is essential, on the one hand, to receive information from conflict zones in the most transparent and accurate way possible, through authorities competent in humanitarian and human rights matters. On the other hand, we have to redouble the efforts to strengthen consensus and confidence in the concept of the protection of civilians, which is based on respect for the universally accepted norms of international, humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Imnadze (Georgia): At the outset, let me express our gratitude to the presidency of the Republic of Lithuania for organizing today's open debate and for the concept note (S/2014/74, annex) distributed earlier, which has significantly contributed to our deliberations today.

Georgia fully associates itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union. In addition, I would like to make some comments in my national capacity.

One of the purposes of the debate today is to see the United Nations more engaged in addressing all the relevant challenges. Therefore, the ability of the international community to monitor and assess the human rights situation in the areas where the authorities of a given State cannot exercise their sovereign rights is of the utmost importance. Safe and unhindered access for humanitarian actors is essential not just for much-needed humanitarian aid, but also as an early-warning mechanism for assessment and evaluation of the human rights situation on the ground to avoid further deterioration of an already grave situation.

Fifteen years have passed since the Security Council held its first open debate on this issue (see S/PV.4046). But while reflecting on our endeavours, we have to confess that innocent civilians continue to be the overwhelming majority of victims, deprived of existential necessities and basic human rights. Such is the reality in many corners of the world. It includes my country as well, which had to endure yet another wave of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) as an aftermath of a military aggression from a neighbouring country a few years ago.

As I make this statement, 20 per cent of my nation's territory remains under Russia's illegal military occupation, and the number of refugees and IDPs is over 400,000. Despite serious concerns raised by the relevant United Nations agencies, hundreds of thousands of Georgian IDPs and refugees continue to be denied their internationally recognized right to return to their homes — a right reaffirmed on numerous occasions by the community of nations.

The people residing in the occupied regions and in the adjacent areas are deprived of their fundamental rights and freedoms, including the freedom of movement, family life, the right to education in their native language and other civil and economic rights. Furthermore, the installation of barbed wire fences and embankments and the so-called "movement detectors" by the occupation forces along the occupation line in the Tskhinvali and Abkhazia regions of Georgia — in itself a gross violation of fundamental human rights and illegal under international law — significantly affect the livelihoods of the local population by dividing families and communities, preventing people-to-people contacts that are essential in building confidence among communities. The local population — being fenced off from arable lands and grazing fields, potable and irrigation water systems and from local cemeteries — are now compelled to flee their places of residence, which creates a new wave of IDPs. We see this as a continuation of a deplorable practice of forcible demographic change.

Much of what I have just mentioned could have been averted if the international community had had a presence in the conflict area. Unfortunately, the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia was terminated following its blockage by a Security Council member in 2009. The European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) is now the only international mission on the territory of Georgia. It plays a key role in averting the deterioration of the situation on the ground, but being denied the access to the occupied territories, the EUMM cannot fully implement its mandate.

I brought here the case of my country as yet another example of the urgent need to take concrete steps to alleviate the consequences of armed hostilities for civilians and to safeguard their rights and freedoms. Strengthening our common efforts to protect civilians in armed conflict has no alternative, and I would like to join other speakers in calling on all the relevant actors to ensure rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to conflict-affected populations worldwide. For our part, we stand ready to contribute to concerted international efforts to ensure more efficient protection of the civilian population.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): I should preface my remarks by congratulating you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency for the month of February. We also thank you for convening this open debate and for your helpful and well-structured concept note (S/2014/74, annex).

My delegation thanks the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, as well as the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their respective briefings.

While this year marks 15 years of pronounced focus and engagement by the Security Council on the protection of civilians, the international community continues to witness the deplorable fact of increasing civilian deaths. The Council's efforts, particularly in mandating a number of United Nations peacekeeping operations with the protection-of-civilians tasks, have heightened international attention and led to the development of an important normative framework on this issue. Yet many challenges have to be tackled to satisfactorily enhance the safeguarding of people during conflicts.

With that background in mind, Indonesia welcomes the adoption of the presidential statement (S/PRST/2014/3), which reiterates the commitments regarding this issue and reaffirms many important elements from our previous relevant presidential statements.

We recognize that protecting civilians is one of the most challenging tasks of United Nations peacekeeping. As the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2013/689) notes, peacekeepers are mandated to carry out increasingly complex missions in increasingly dangerous environments. That necessitates that all peacekeeping stakeholders — not least the Council — ensure that there is full clarity on the concept and operationalization of the protection of civilians and the provision of requisite equipment and resources, with robust and rapid support to and coordination with Blue Helmets and United Nations civilian staff at all times. We value the various significant steps on improving the capabilities of the United Nations peacekeeping operations in that regard.

It is also important to be mindful in this deliberation that the protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of the host country. But human life is most precious, and human dignity must be safeguarded regardless. Indonesia strongly believes that United Nations missions should conduct their tasks without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the host Government to protect civilians. In that context, I would like to mention three points.

First, it is crucial to understand the local dynamics — how the civilian populations try to protect themselves — and to develop strategies that can effectively address threats to civilians at the earliest phase of mandate planning. Indonesia concurs with the concept note that there is a lack of pre-mandate planning and assessment on the protection of civilians. It is therefore very important for the Secretariat and the Security Council, in consultation with the host Government and troop- and police-contributing countries, to develop a sound pre-assessment of the protection of civilians. There should be well-functioning mechanisms based on realistic assessments that can identify early threats before mandate planning, as well as during the various stages of missions.

Secondly, the coherence of efforts on the protection of civilians by the Security Council, the Secretariat, troop- and police-contributing countries, host Governments and other relevant actors cannot be emphasized enough. That collaboration and cooperation can set up the necessary political dialogue to mitigate hostilities on the ground between the parties in conflict and harness the required equipment and resources, yielding essential support and situational awareness for the United Nations missions.

We stress the importance of regular evaluation and reporting on the implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates by United Nations peacekeeping operations and an open dialogue between the Secretariat and Member States, including in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, to undertake a comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects.

Thirdly, Indonesia wishes to emphasize the importance of ensuring that the implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates does not exceed the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping missions. Indonesia recognizes the importance of monitoring, evaluating and reporting by United Nations peacekeeping operations on the implementation of their protection-of-civilians mandates in that regard. While the approach must be holistic, we reiterate that protection mandates should be clear and achievable, with explicit goals and guidelines for Blue Helmets. Moreover, the senior mission leadership should maintain close coordination and have a clear understanding of the mechanisms available to work on the protection of civilians.

In that context, we also underscore that the relevant planning processes, guidance materials and training modules, before and during deployment, should be based on information gleaned from contemporary missions and be up to the mark.

Indonesia concurs, in that regard, with the call made in 2012 by the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations on the importance of widely disseminating information among peacekeeping personnel about the Charter of the United Nations, international humanitarian and human rights and refugee law, including in training materials, in order to enable them to better understand the interconnections between the implementation of the protection-of-civilians mandate and those fields of law and to act accordingly.

Furthermore, as peacekeeping has grown to encompass the broader humanitarian approach, it is worth underlining the importance of strengthening our efforts to increase the number of female peacekeepers in United Nations peacekeeping missions. Their role and presence in United Nations peacekeeping missions have been critical, including in supporting peacebuilding and protecting civilians.

For its part, Indonesia is committed to enhancing the capacities of its peacekeepers in the area of the protection of civilians before deployment and will continue to improve its training on that issue at our peacekeeping training centre, the Indonesian Peace and Security Centre.

Finally, we hope that the fifteenth anniversary of the Council's initial engagement on this issue will further the promotion of the culture of protection and strengthen cooperation and synergy among the concerned entities inside and outside the United Nations system.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I would like to express our appreciation and respect for the historic Lithuanian presidency of the Security Council.

The Netherlands aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

This debate is timely and important. The legal basis for the protection of civilians in armed conflict is of course strong, but a lack of clarity surrounds the concept and its operationalization in practice, as Lithuania mentioned in its excellent note for this debate (S/2014/74, annex).

In our view, a close relationship exists between the two concepts of the responsibility to protect and the protection of civilians in conflict situations. Conceptually, the responsibility to protect and the protection of civilians are distinct. The responsibility to protect is focused on four specific crimes: genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, in conflict and non-conflict situations. The protection of civilians is different in scope, as it aims to protect the general safety, dignity and integrity of all human beings in conflict situations.

At the same time, the two concepts are also closely related, as they share a similar normative foundation: the protection of individuals is a primary responsibility of the State, and prevention and early warning are key to both concepts. The international community plays a supportive role in both principles.

I would like to focus my comments today on the protection of civilians on three issues, namely, prevention, protection and accountability.

On prevention, it is obvious that the best way to protect civilians in any situation is to prevent a conflict from happening. The means of the pacific settlement of conflict, as defined in Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations, are crucial.

Therefore, the Netherlands supports the United Nations as a global actor in the field of mediation. When it comes to the judicial settlement of conflicts, the International Court of Justice and the Permanent Court of Arbitration, which are both housed in the Peace Palace in The Hague, are global icons of the pursuit of peace by means of the law and of conflict prevention.

Another crucial element is early warning. My Government fully supports the initiative of the United Nations under the action plan entitled "Rights up front", which of course is also closely linked to the responsibility to protect. We believe that interaction between the countries in the Security Council and other United Nations States Members should be improved so as to strengthen early warning and early response.

When it comes to protection, international humanitarian law should be respected by all parties to a conflict. That is why, in January in Kenya, the Netherlands organized a training course for military and civilian representatives from 11 African countries on gender awareness and the prevention of sexual violence in peacekeeping.

Secondly, peacekeeping mandates, as has been stated by other speakers, must be clear on the protection of civilians, and implementation must be a priority. New concepts, such as civilian-harm tracking, the appointment of civilian-harm mitigation advisers and ways to make amends, are being tested, and we believe that the results warrant further assessment and use.

Peacekeeping missions must be better prepared and outfitted for that part of their mandate, and we must all chip in. The Netherlands is sending a peacekeeping unit to Mali, and we deploy experts in the protection of civilians and sexual and gender-based violence in various United Nations missions.

Thirdly, the Security Council should act decisively when civilians are at risk. In South Sudan, the Council was united and swift. It is crucial that the Security Council adopt the draft resolution on humanitarian access in Syria. We are gravely concerned about the situation in Homs and call for access on the part of humanitarian organizations to all besieged areas in Syria. Furthermore, my Government supports initiatives aimed at voluntary restraint in the use of the veto by the permanent members of the Council in situations of mass atrocities.

I now come to my last point: accountability. The perpetrators of crimes must of course not go unpunished, and accountability is also crucial in view of the preventative effect it has. In our view, the Council should refer Syria and the crimes perpetrated there to the International Criminal Court (ICC). In anticipation of that, the Netherlands supports the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre in The Hague. We do so with the conviction that, even though the world at this moment is unable to stop the tragedy, the foundation must be laid for bringing the perpetrators of the atrocities in Syria to justice when sufficient stability returns to Syria. The Council could more consistently use its ability to impose sanctions, or refer a situation to the ICC. That would send a strong signal to perpetrators.

Together we can bring the concept of the protection of civilians into practice. In our view, the Council's Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians should intensify its work and its interaction with rest of the membership. Protecting civilians in armed conflict is a fundamental objective that we must all work tirelessly to achieve together, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands stands ready to be a part of that effort.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Rakhmetullin (Kazakhstan): At the outset, I would like to commend Lithuania for having convened this open debate on the important theme of the protection of civilians, as well as the speakers who have briefed us on the issues and challenges encountered in the protection of civilians. I would also like to acknowledge the outstanding work of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and of the peacekeepers who risk their lives for the cause of peace and security.

I will confine my comments to Kazakhstan's experiences of deployment in Iraq and other interventions, as well as our future deployment in the coming months to the missions in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Western Sahara and Haiti.

While it is clear that the maintenance of peace and the protection of civilians is the joint responsibility and task of the Security Council, DPKO, the Department of Field Support, troop- and police-contributing countries, peacekeepers themselves on the ground and, most important, the host Government, it is often found that adequate cooperation and operational clarity on the implementation of mandates have not always been possible. That is due to the differing perceptions and geopolitical standpoints of members of the Security Council, the parties involved in the conflict and the players on the ground. There is therefore an imperative need for a clear understanding, interpretation and implementation of resolution 1894 (2009) through greater cohesion among mandates, intentions and expectations, especially if civilian protection requires the use of force.

Recently, the multifaceted nature of present-day peacekeeping operations, with political, military, human rights and humanitarian components and mandates and operating under the aegis of a single United Nations mission, is a welcome development and leads to positive synergies and ease in decision-making on enhancing the protection of civilians. On the other hand, we run the risk of blurring roles and responsibilities, especially between humanitarian work, judicial investigation and the provision of security through an armed presence, all of which require our attention as we move forward.

We are pleased to note the efforts of DPKO, which, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross, humanitarian aid agencies and the countries contributing troops and police personnel, in preparing a conceptual framework to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various components of a mission. Moreover, when United Nations forces are drawn into an armed conflict, it is obvious that international humanitarian law should govern military operations, to which all parties to the armed conflict, including United Nations forces, should adhere.

Civilian protection is complex and requires multidimensional provisions and different competencies and skills for each vulnerable group: women and children subject to horrific atrocities; child soldiers; survivors displaced by force or, for lack of choice, taking refuge in camps where they are often defenceless against armed attacks and harassment; victims maimed by mines and other indiscriminate munitions; and those dying of the indirect effects of armed conflict, such as disease, malnutrition and famine. Each mission therefore must bring together many different actors over time, from planning to execution, including the active participation of women at each stage of the process.

Maintaining relations with host countries is a critical issue, particularly in situations where the host Government bans peacekeepers from entering the country or decides to expel peacekeepers before they have completed their mandates, thus jeopardizing the safety of the civilian population.

My delegation recalls with great appreciation the operational innovations in a number of missions, such as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite the limited resources and hazardous security environments. Those operations have increasingly used and developed mobile operational bases, quick- response units and early-warning systems to anticipate, prevent or deter violence against civilians or to rapidly intervene to stop it. Such examples are worthy of replication.

The issues of mission size, troop strength, adequate resources and equipment, especially for remote areas, the expertise of personnel and their commitment and cooperation among the parties are factors that lend credibility to any mission — the greater their extent, the greater the effectiveness to protect civilians against armed attacks by Government forces or rebels. States Members of the United Nations are therefore urged to make larger contributions and to provide capacity-building and technical assistance for peacekeeping operations and to enable the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Support Office to fully discharge their functions.

Kazakhstan, in bidding for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 2017 to 2018, is committed to working with the international community in supporting and strengthening the capacity of DPKO and the Security Council to fulfil their peace and security mandates.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Reyes Rodríguez (Cuba) (spoke in Spanish): We thank the Secretary-General for having submitted his tenth report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2013/689). We agree with his conclusion that the current situation leaves little room for optimism.

Cuba supports the need to protect civilians in armed conflict in accordance with international law, in particular, international humanitarian law, enshrined in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

We are nearing the seventieth anniversary of the Organization's establishment as a result of the resolute decision of its peoples to protect future generations from the scourge of war. We have been successful in preventing a third world war but not in avoiding wars altogether. That is still unfinished business of the Organization and is the responsibility of all its States Members. Nothing justifies the killing of innocent people, and Cuba strongly condemns such action wherever it may occur. Nor do we accept genocide in the name of peace or the spurious justification to protect civilians to conceal the real objective of overthrowing a political, economic and social order that the people subject to the aggression have decided to build in the exercise of its soveriegn powers, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their self-determination.

As States Members of the United Nations, we must act decisively to prevent conflicts. Preventing their outbreak is the safest and cheapest way to protect civilians. As Member States, we must strictly uphold the Charter of the United Nations, in particular respect for its principles and purposes We must not foment or fuel conflicts when they unavoidably occur. The pursuit of peace, and its strengthening once it is achieved, must be the main objective when a conflict flares up. United Nations peace forces must devote their efforts and resources to achieving those objectives.

There is no justification for world military spending continuing to reach astronomical figures. Today, it amounts to $1.75 trillion, which is equivalent to 2.5 per cent of the world's gross domestic product. The arms race is not slowing down. On the contrary, every day we see the appearance of new and more sophisticated kinds of weapons. Against whom will those weapons be used? Are they intended to protect civilians? The wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, to mention but a few examples, show that that is not the case. The civilian deaths in those wars were more than 90 per cent of the casualties.

United Nations peacekeeping operations, in particular those that have a mandate to protect civilians, must be guided by the principles of the Charter and under no circumstance become a means to change Governments or to engage in military aggression. The protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of the host State of the peacekeeping operation. United Nations peace force mandates must therefore be implemented without prejudice to the responsibility of the host State.

It is important to recall that the General Assembly has the primary responsibility in the United Nations for developing concepts and polices and for dealing with the budgetary aspects of peacekeeping operations. In that context, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations is the only forum in the United Nations with a mandate to broadly review all aspects of peacekeeping operations. Its recommendations cover the question of the protection of civilians and are very relevant for today's debate.

Coordination among the host countries of United Nations peacekeeping operations and troop- and police-contributing countries is essential. In his report, the Secretary-General also highlights the modifications made to the mandates of some field operations so as to authorize offensive actions. That is a delicate and contentious point, in the light of the basic principles governing the operation of peacekeeping missions of the Organization since its inception: respect for the sovereign equality, the political independence and the territorial integrity of all States, and non-interference in their internal affairs. Member States must ensure that those principles are strictly upheld and remove any barriers to their application.

We share the concern of the Secretary-General regarding the use of new technologies, in particular of remote-controlled unmanned aircraft and so-called autonomous weapons systems. If we truly want to take action to protect civilians in armed conflicts, we cannot leave such developments out of our deliberations. The General Assembly should consider them with a view to preventing such technologies from being used to commit extrajudicial killings and other crimes against innocent civilians. In addition, those responsible must face justice and be held accountable for their crimes. The Security Council should not stand on the sidelines of those issues.

The report of the Secretary-General remains silent once again on the dangers posed by nuclear weapons, despite the fact that some nuclear-weapon States stand ready to use them, even in conventional conflicts. The international community is redoubling its efforts to finally achieve the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, which is the only sustainable solution in response to the immense threat they pose. On 26 September, we will mark the first International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, as declared by the General Assembly in its resolution 68/32. The humanitarian consequences of such weapons are part of the problem, and Cuba advocates that they be addressed with the same approach.

It is impossible to advocate for the effective protection of civilians in conflicts while at the same time defending the use of nuclear weapons as part of military doctrines. It is impossible to advocate for the effective protection of civilians in armed conflicts while at the same time stoking armed clashes and supplying weapons to non-State actors, as is occurring at present in Syria. It is impossible to advocate for the effective protection of civilians in conflicts while at the same time being complicit in the crimes being committed against the Palestinian people and other Arab peoples under occupation.

The region of Latin America and the Caribbean has taken a leading role in promoting peace and the peaceful resolution of disputes. Just a few days ago, on 29 January, the leaders of theStates members of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, meeting at the second Summit of the Community in Havana, declared Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace, as part of a comprehensive process that seeks to end forever the threat or use of force as a means of resolving conflicts, social inequality, poverty, illiteracy and the lack of free and universal access to basic services such as health and education — a world guided by solidarity and cooperation among our peoples to achieve prosperity and a region where human rights are promoted and protected, including the rights to development and to live in full freedom and dignity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Patriota (Brazil): I thank you, Madam, for convening this timely and important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I would also like to thank High Commissioner Navi Pillay, Under-Secretaries-General Valerie Amos and Hervé Ladsous, and Director-General Yves Daccord for their presentations.

Brazil firmly believes that conflict prevention is one of the most effective ways to protect civilians. The international community must be guided, first and foremost, by the objective of avoiding the risks of armed conflict and the human costs associated with it. In situations where conflicts occur, diplomacy should be given priority and coercion should remain a last resort. As the international community has observed in many of the challenges it has had to confront, the mirage of the military solution often degenerates into the nightmare of greater civilian suffering.

Where coercive measures may be contemplated, the use of force needs to be as moderate as possible, in order to avoid harming civilians, who must be protected. That is why Brazil is of the view that the international community should not only abide by its responsibility to protect civilians, but also demonstrate responsibility while protecting civilians.

Furthermore, as highlighted on previous occasions, we understand that, in order to create a more stable environment for civilians, it is crucial to address the root causes of conflict. Social and economic issues can become potential drivers of conflict. A comprehensive approach is of the utmost importance for achieving sustainable solutions and, as a consequence, the long-term protection of civilians. Also, in a world with thousands of nuclear weapons, civilians will be truly safe and protected only when genuine nuclear disarmament is materialized.

As the concept note (S/2014/74, annex) prepared by Lithuania rightly underlines, 2014 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Security Council's formal engagement with the protection of civilians. The United Nations has made great strides in this area since then, both in the Council and in other forums. Protection mandates are now regarded as an essential dimension of peacekeeping operations. The international community agrees that it is part of our collective responsibility to safeguard civilians from the scourge of conflicts. The commitments that all Member States undertook in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must be upheld.

However, as is pointed out by the Secretary-General in his latest report (S/2013/689), the current state of the protection of civilians leaves little room for optimism, with serious violations being reported in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the occupied Palestinian territory and elsewhere. Clearly in many cases, a military-centred approach to peace and stability, with the aim of providing improved protection to civilians, has not achieved satisfactory goals from either a security or a moral perspective. That only enhances our responsibility in ascribing priority to mediation, diplomacy and negotiation. If we mean what we say when we adopt texts affirming that there is no military solution to a certain situation, we must act accordingly and invest more resources in mediation and preventive diplomacy.

In peacekeeping operations, the protection of civilians should be seen as a multidimensional task to be pursued by all mission components in the field, and by both the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support at Headquarters. Let me also recall that we are currently witnessing new experiments in some pivotal peacekeeping concepts. The authorization for more robust and offensive mandates, which may pose serious risks to the protection of civilians, requires an even higher and more careful degree of planning and training. It is also essential to ensure that peacekeeping missions have the capabilities and resources they need to discharge their protection responsibilities as effectively as possible. Too many missions lack the equipment, personnel or assets that are necessary to properly protect civilians.

The humanitarian imperative that should guide the United Nations requires that the protection of civilians be implemented in a universal and non-selective manner. It is worth recalling, in that regard, that multilateral efforts must comply with international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including in the context of the fight against terrorism.

We should also reflect on the use of new weapon technologies, particularly the use of drones. As the Secretary-General emphasizes in his report, the use of such technologies raises important concerns over

> "compliance with international human rights law and with the international humanitarian law rules of distinction, proportionality and precaution" (*S/2013/689, para. 26*).

The International Committee of the Red Cross has also underlined that there can be no doubt that international humanitarian law applies to new weaponry and to all new technology used in warfare.

One should not underestimate the complexities that arise from the use of such new autonomous weapons systems and their extraterritorial deployment, which, especially when armed, may violate airspace sovereignty, including in areas outside of conflict zones. Many elements have to be carefully considered, such as the fact that armed drones subject targeted countries, communities, families and individuals to a high degree of asymmetric vulnerability, in defiance of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights.

When discussing the protection of civilians, one should also note that the adoption of sanctions may have a profound negative impact in the lives of the civilian population, while not necessarily contributing to the solution of a crisis. As a matter of fact, the rush to economic sanctions may aggravate situations of concern, instead of resolving them. In many occasions, it creates a logic of punishment and isolation, instead of a dynamic of dialogue and persuasion.

The situation in Syria serves as an example in that regard. The international community has failed so far to reach an agreement to end the provision of weapons to parties in conflict, which would be instrumental in protecting civilians and would send a clear message indicating that there is no military solution to the conflict. On the other hand, some States have decided to adopt unilateral economic sanctions, which, as demonstrated by the Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, end up having a harmful impact on the Syrian civilian population.

Brazil believes that the fifth revision of the aide-mémoire prepared by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and adopted by the Council today (S/PRST/2014/3, annex) is a useful and practical lessons-learned guide. We hope that it will further contribute to the concrete implementation of the Council's decisions on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The Council can count on Brazil's support for that goal.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Nkoloi (Botswana): Let me congulate Lithuania on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February and for organizing this debate. We appreciate the briefings by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his latest report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2013/689), which is the basis of our discussions today.

Botswana attaches great importance to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Our contribution to the discussions on that thematic area, including peacekeeping, and on how best to assist Governments in protecting their own populations remains a key priority for my delegation. We remain committed to the promotion of and respect for humanitarian principles in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. We believe that this is the best way to achieve an effective delivery of humanitarian assistance and the necessary space to access vulnerable populations in conflict situations.To that end, we reiterate our long-held belief, which is shared by many, that States have the primary responsibility to protect their own populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The promotion of accountability for human rights violations and access to justice also remains a key issue for my delegation. Botswana joins the international community in deploring the continuing human rights violations in battlefields around the world where innocent civilians have become casualties of merciless killings by warring factions. We are disheartened by the fact that perpetrators of those crimes continue to undermine international humanitarian law and human rights law through their acts and deeds.

As a friend and supporter of the International Criminal Court, we have a commitment to upholding the rule of law, and we have strong faith in the institution as an international court of last resort. We remain concerned that hundreds of human rights abusers remain at large, frustrating the course of justice and endangering innocent women and children. We call for collaboration and coordination between the International Criminal Court and the United Nations, through its peacekeeping missions ,to hunt down, arrest and investigate perpetrators of human rights abuse. We believe that this synergy will go a long way in strengthening the international criminal justice system and putting a human face on the victim. We believe that the international community, as a peace-loving world, has a moral obligation and responsibility to intensify efforts to protect innocent civilians, especially women and children, who are often victims of torture and rape and other sexual abuse.

Turning to the report of the Secretary-General, my delegation takes note of the five core challenges to enhancing the protection of civilians. We note that several initiatives are being pursued in that regard. We also recognize the attention drawn to the concerns expressed by an increasing number of States about the emergence and use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We share the Secretary-General's view on the need to strengthen the protection of civilians from the use of those weapons and that parties to any conflict should refrain from their use.

With regard to the role of peacekeeping and other missions, we take note of the deployment of peacekeeping operations and special political missions in many countries around the world as the most significant action taken by the Security Council. The proliferation of such missions illustrates just how instrumental they are in the maintenance of international peace and security. We recognize the complex and violent environments in which peacekeeping personnel operate. We also share the view that care and attention should be given to strengthening missions' capabilities. To achieve that, we believe that constant training and capacity-building of personnel before deployment is an absolute necessity.

Botswana believes that timely and unimpeded humanitarian access is a fundamental prerequisite for humanitarian action to save the lives of civilians.

However, we note with regret the challenges that continue to constrain humanitarian response in a number of situations, as stated in the report, including restrictions on movement and violence against humanitarian workers.

Regarding accountability for war crimes and violations of human rights and humanitarian law, we note the important measures that some States continue to be take, but we believe that more needs to be done to support the Secretary-General's recommendations in that regard.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm Botswana's support for the international community's efforts to protect innocent civilians. I wish to stress the importance of consolidating and ensuring the implementation of the existing normative frameworks on the protection of civilians in country-specific situations.

Finally, we support efforts for better coordination and cooperation within the United Nations peacebuilding architecture, as well as with other peacebuilding actors, for promoting engagement in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Eler (Turkey): I would like to thank the Lithuanian presidency for organizing this important debate.

The framework for the protection of civilians has increasingly advanced since the human tragedies of the Rwanda and Srebrenica genocides. The need to protect and assist civilians affected by armed conflict has been stressed in numerous Security Council resolutions since 1999. The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/689), the recommendations made by the Internal Review Panel on the United Nations Action in Sri Lanka, and the agenda entitled "Rights up front" have been the latest examples that have contrubuted to the elaboration of a conceptual and normative framework related to the protection of civilians. It is now time to look into how to translate that into practice.

However, the civilian death toll continues to rise, with recent alarming signals coming from Afghanistan, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, among many other places. The Secretary-General's report points out a multitude of challenges in Syria, ranging from attacks on civilians and civilian deaths to displacement, a lack and arbitrary denial of humanitarian access, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, the indiscriminate use of heavy wepons and aerial bombardments, summary and extrajudicial executions, enforced disapperances and attacks on schools, hospitals and other public facilities, among many others.

The role of peacekeeping and other missions in the protection of civilians in conflict is essential. It is high time to start developing coherent and effective general strategies in order to respond to the ever-worsening situation of civilians in armed conflict. Those strategies should also respond to the changing international context and the new realities on the ground.

States have the primary responsibility for protecting their civilians. Parties to conflict must uphold humanitarian and human rights principles and comply with their international humanitarian and human rights obligations, ensure accountability and provide the necessary support and services to those who are suffering or have suffered in situations of conflict. The United Nations and the international community must assist them in this burdensome task, supporting them in terms of capacity-building and the provision of available resources in times of need, upon request, and taking the necessary measures when the actors primarily responsible fail to do so.

Monitoring and reporting are among the most important contributions that peacekeeping and other missions can provide, especially in field missions where accessibility is a problem. United Nations and other missions can be crucial sources of trustworthy information, which can lead to awareness-raising as well as to better planning, protection and response. That increases the importance of objective, consistent and responsible reporting. From this perspective, we also fully support fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry, and we believe that we should be able to make better use of their findings. To that end, States should provide full access to mandated missions to observe and report.

Furthermore, the United Nations, its missions and its agencies could play a valuable coordinating role among the many actors involved, which could contribute towards realizing protection-of-civilians mandates. For United Nations missions and peacekeeping operations to achieve those goals, it is essential that they be provided with necessary support, equipment and resources.

Disadvantaged categories of the population, such as women, children, people with disabilities and older persons, should be given special attention in the process of the design of protection-of-civilians mandates and strategies, as well as in the training programmes of military, police and civilian personnel. The prevention of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, as well as the provision of services to those suffering from such violence, should be a particular area of focus.

There is a compelling need, in working on such strategies, to listen more attentively to regional countries and organizations, troop-contributing countries and other relevant actors that are active in crisis areas. The Secretary-General's report (S/2013/689) highlights the comprehensive and cross-cutting nature of efforts relating to the protection of civilians and the importance of bringing together different actors towards that end. Mediation and other conflict-prevention mechanisms should be utilized to the fullest extent. As such, we welcome the relevant part of the concept note (S/2014/74, annex) prepared by the Lithuanian presidency, which emphasizes the need to consult a broad range of actors in the implementation of civilian-protection tasks and beyond.

For protection-of-civilians mandates to be fully realized, the strong support of the international community is essential. The Syrian crisis, which is resulting in the loss of thousands of civilian lives before our very eyes, is a sad and striking reminder of the importance of unity and immediate joint action.

In concluding, I would like to stress our appreciation to the hardworking personnel of the United Nations, whose courageous and tireless efforts help prevent the loss of the lives of thousands of civilians around the globe every day.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ireland.

Mr. Donoghue (Ireland): I wish at the outset to align my delegation with the statement delivered on behalf of the EU and its member States.

In his most recent report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2013/689), the Secretary-General concludes that the current state of the protection of civilians leaves little room for optimism. His report describes in stark terms the violence, insecurity and human rights violations which are at present characteristic of Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Mali, South Sudan and Syria.

Although those conflicts and insecure environments have their own distinctive features, they have at least one element in common: it is civilians who bear the brunt of the suffering being inflicted and who account for the vast majority of the casualties.

The primary responsibility for the protection of civilians lies, of course, with the parties to a given conflict. There is, however, a crucial role to be played by United Nations peacekeepers. The protection of civilians caught up in war remains at the heart of what the United Nations does and what it stands for. As the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and its member States put it, the protection of civilians must be the benchmark against which we measure the success of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

In his report, dated 22 November 2013, the Secretary-General urges Member States to ensure that their peacekeepers are given the pre-deployment training they need for the protection of civilians according to United Nations standards and that important resources such as air mobility assets and early warning are provided along with troops.

We have seen the difference made by 3,000 well-equipped South African, Tanzanian and Malawian troops in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Force Intervention Brigade. To complement the deployments made by traditional large troop-contributing countries, the Secretariat should make a concerted effort to broaden the base of troop contributors. The Security Council and the Secretariat should work to enhance interaction with all troop contributors, in accordance with presidential note 630 (S/2013/630) of last October.

This year we are marking the twentieth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda. It is also 15 years since the adoption of resolution 1265 (1999). During this period, we have seen a number of positive developments relating to the role of United Nations peacekeepers in protecting civilians. These include the increased integration of protection of civilians into the mandates for United Nations peacekeeping missions; improvements in the capacity of these missions, including the establishment of women's protection advisers and of mobile human rights teams; and the increased role played by regional organizations in relation to preventing and limiting violations of international humanitarian law.

But significant challenges remain. There has been an alarming growth in the incidence and scale of intra-State conflicts, which are responsible for rising civilian casualties and where we are also seeing — as in South Sudan at present — the increased targeting of peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel.

My delegation welcomes the inclusion of the protection of civilians in Security Council resolutions. We would like, furthermore, to see the capacity of United Nations peacekeeping missions strengthened through standardized in-mission training, through the development of protection-of-civilians mission strategies, and through resources being made available which would permit a greater focus on prevention and early-warning analysis.

Small arms are the weapons of choice in many of today's conflicts. As a strong supporter of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), Ireland looks forward to the early entry into force of ATT provisions, which will help to stop destabilizing flows of arms into conflict regions. We are also keenly aware of the excellent work being undertaken by the United Nations Mine Action Service, including the steps it is taking in Libya and elsewhere to secure and demilitarize stockpiles of weapons and ammunition. If such work had been possible in the Central African Republic during the course of 2013, significant amounts of weaponry might have been kept out of the hands of militant groups, and civilian lives would have been saved.

It is a truism that the most effective form of protection is prevention. And yet it remains the case that far too little emphasis is placed on peacebuilding and prevention. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan is on the whole a good example of the impact that a United Nations mission can have in mitigating the risks to a local population. Yet there are also clear lessons to be learned from recent events there. In South Sudan and in other fragile or post-conflict societies, the need to build sustained and resilient peace, including through efforts towards reconciliation, has never been more apparent.

Nowhere, finally, is the need for protection of civilians more apparent than in Syria, where more than 3 million people remain trapped in areas of heavy fighting which are besieged by Government or opposition forces. Under-Secretary-General Amos has spoken frequently and eloquently of the humanitarian plight of ordinary Syrian men, women and children. While the regime bears primary responsibility for the conflict, both the authorities and armed opposition groups must take immediate action to uphold international humanitarian law and to facilitate the safe and unhindered delivery of assistance to those who so urgently need it.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ethiopia.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I wish to thank the Lithuanian delegation for taking the initiative to convene today's open debate on a very serious issue that has been the subject of a series of debates in the Security Council for almost 15 years, but with little progress to show. Clearly, it is very difficult to make progress on such a complex and difficult issue.

The protection of civilians in armed conflicts is a treaty obligation under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, which States have the responsibility to respect and observe. But few treaty-based obligations are as abused and overlooked as the obligation to protect civilians in armed conflicts. That is a real tragedy, and it highlights how much we have failed as an international community. There can be no higher obligation than protecting civilians — women, the young and the old — during times of armed conflict.

As mentioned earlier, the protection of civilians is also a treaty obligation that all self-respecting nations have a responsibility to scrupulously observe. I am deliberately stressing the role of the State in this context because States obviously have the primary responsibility for ensuring the protection of civilians in times of armed conflict. I do so also because in the various reports of the Secretary–General on the matter there appears to be a yawning gap with respect to the way in which the role of the State is presented. I will come back to that shortly, but first permit me to make a general comment on the five challenges to ensuring more effective protection for civilians that have been underlined by the Secretary–General in his various reports.

While all five challenges — enhancing compliance by parties to conflict with international law, enhancing compliance by non-State armed groups, enhancing protection through United Nations peacekeeping missions, improving humanitarian access, and enhancing accountability for violations — are all extremely relevant, one wonders nonetheless if there are no other challenges that are possibly equally relevant.

From our experience in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region, it appears necessary to stress the value of respecting the principles of international law governing inter-State relations. That is critical, including from the point of view of enhancing trust — which is a critical element in this endeavour — between humanitarian agencies of all kinds and their workers, on one hand, and the concerned States, on the other.

Another challenge is the need to enhance transparency with respect to the way in which those who take up the noble task of protecting civilians in armed conflicts as a vocation carry out their activities. It must be emphasized that while indeed there are those who take their responsibility and calling seriously, there are also adventurist types who are there to help what they take to be the underdog and give scant attention to the concerns of State authorities. The result is suspicion directed at the activities of those who carry out their obligation with scrupulous neutrality. The cause of the protection of civilians suffers as a result.

There is also sound justification for objecting to the way in which one of the five challenges mentioned in the report (S/2013/689) of the Security-General is supposed to be promoted. This relates to what is referred to as enhancing compliance of non-State armed groups with international law. First of all, that fails to make a distinction between situations where States have collapsed and situations where there are States fully capable of discharging their responsibilities but which might face difficulties with respect to some part of their territories and for a given duration of time. The reports of the Secretary-General rely heavily on the work of the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights to find ways of ensuring compliance by non-State armed groups with international law. In our view, that goes overboard in seeking with incentives with which to cajole non-State armed groups into offering their cooperation. It seems clear that the result of all of that is the partial undermining of State authority. In the long run, the cause of the protection of civilians also suffers.

That brings us back to what I said at the beginning with respect to the gap in how the role of the State is presented in the reports of the Secretary-General. We in the IGAD region have had a lot of experience in that regard. Of course, based on the latest developments in our region, we would be mindless to ignore the failure of States to provide protection to civilians. That requires extensive analysis, for another day. But different situations should not be conflated, and context matters. Where there are strong State institutions, undue overtures to non-State actors might contribute to the weakening of States, thus compounding the challenge of providing protection to civilians.

Undoubtedly, the protection of civilians in armed conflict is becoming more, not less, complex and difficult. Technological progress and resort to various methods of waging war have made the challenge ever more complicated.

Let us be frank — few States can claim to have fully met their international obligations in protecting civilians. It is very difficult as well to argue that the United Nations record in this area has been sterling. Perhaps what is critical now is to undertake a frank assessment of what we have done over the past 15 years, where we are now and how we wish to proceed to ensure that the protection of civilians in armed conflict is a genuine commitment devoid of the inclination to politicize the issue.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Ms. Frankinet (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union, as well as the statement by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

We thank the Lithuanian presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's debate. We also thank the Secretary-General for his very forward-looking tenth report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2013/689).

The protection of civilians in times of war — a concept at the heart of international humanitarian law — imposes on parties to an armed conflict the obligation to protect civilians by respecting fundamental principles, such as the distinction between civilians and combatants, proportionality and prudence in attacks and, naturally, the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks. Similarly, parties to a conflict have the obligation to give special protection to medical staff and equipment and humanitarian assistance. They must guarantee access to medical care and humanitarian assistance. Unfortunately, those principles are violated on a daily basis, particularly in Syria and South Sudan.

The Syrian Government is bombing certain locations with barrels containing explosives, thus killing many civilians, including children. However, the use of indiscriminate explosive weapons in populated areas violates the rules and principles of international humanitarian law, as the Secretary-General noted in his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Moreover, besides the agreement concluded for the evacuation of women and children from the city of Homs, the parties must allow humanitarian relief to reach the entire civilian population, guarantee the security of humanitarian convoys and remove administrative obstacles. The parties must guarantee humanitarian access to the civilian population.

In September 2013, at the initiative of the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, 27 States from several continents and the European Commission signed a petition calling on all the parties to the Syrian conflict to immediately respect their obligations with regard to protecting civilians as well as medical personnel, infrastructure and transport vehicles, to authorize and facilitate immediate and unhindered access to humanitarian relief throughout the country and to guarantee without delay the security and safety of humanitarian personnel in carrying out their functions.

Belgium today wishes to reiterate that appeal, which the presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15) partially integrated and which the statement made by the observer of the European Union earlier today also addressed. Belgium also wishes to recall that 11 actions that could be implemented immediately were developed in Rome on 3 February by the high-level working group on the humanitarian challenges in Syria.

Belgium would also like to reiterate that there can be no lasting peace unless justice is done — unless the perpetrators of atrocious crimes are punished by a criminal jurisdiction. Granted, as the Secretary-General states in his report, some progress is being made in that regard in a number of countries. But further efforts are always required from States, which bear the primary responsibility for combating impunity. Belgium calls on all States that have still to do so to adopt national legislation providing for the prosecution of persons suspected of war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide, to ratify the Rome Statute and to fully cooperate with the International Criminal Court.

Belgium encourages Member States to establish witness protection programmes, for which it is ready to share its own technical expertise. Finally, we stress the need to bolster inter-State judicial cooperation in order to facilitate the prosecution of those crimes before national jurisdictions, in accordance with the principle of complementarity.

I also want to recall — as the Head of the European Union delegation just did — the letter that was addressed to the Security Council over a year ago by 57 countries, including Belgium, expressing their wish to see the situation in Syria referred to the International Criminal Court Prosecutor.

Allow me to emphasize that it is always preferable to prevent conflicts before getting to a point where peace missions are necessary. That is why we support the Secretary-General's "Rights up front" initiative, which stresses the promotion of early warning and timely action.

I would like to reiterate the initiative of France on voluntarily restricting the right of the veto when a situation of a mass crime is recorded — a voluntary approach that does not involve a revision of the Charter of the United Nations. Belgium encourages the other permanent members the Security Council to be open to this.

The primary responsibility for the protection of civilian populations lies with the parties to the conflicts. The Security Council nevertheless has a role to play in ensuring that peacekeeping operations have a clear mandate, enjoining them not only to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid but also to protect civilians, particularly those under imminent threat of physical violence, as provided for in sub-paragraph 8 (h) of resolution 2086 (2013). Everything must be done, both by the United Nations and the Member States, so that all persons engaged in those operations are aware of the obligation to protect civilians. Similarly, we must ensure that the meticulous preparation of peacekeeping operations, their organization and the requisite coordination with the local authorities and all international stakeholders guarantee the success of the protection-of-civilians aspect of the United Nations mandate.

In his report the Secretary-General refers to the challenges that new weapons technologies pose to the protection of civilians in times of war. First, concerning armed drones, their use must be in accordance with the rules of international law, including humanitarian law and the laws governing armed conflicts. Secondly, regarding autonomous weapons systems, or killer robots, before their use becomes widespread, it is essential to begin thinking and discussion, including in the United Nations, on the ethical questions and criminal responsibility arising from the use of such weapons.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. AlOtaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Lithuanian presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. We are very confident in its abilities to guide the work of the Council. We are also grateful for the preparation of the concept note (S/2014/74, annex) and for this debate. Our thanks also goes to the President of the Security Council in January, the representative of Jordan, for his outstanding leadership of the Council, which coincided with the beginning of Jordan's two-year term as a member of the Council.

Today we are considering a question very important for international relations — the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The last time the Council addressed the question was in August 2013 (see S/PV.7019). We have an important opportunity to assess challenges facing civilians in conflict situations. The majority of statements made today have stressed the sensitive concerns regarding the issue. Many tragic examples have been referred to — examples from a large number of countries that have suffered from civil wars, conflicts that have left many civilian victims. Various United Nations reports reiterate the importance and scope of this issue.

There is no doubt that responsibility for the protection of civilians rests above all with the States concerned. When there are mass violations of international humanitarian law, which we have been noting in many regions, the State should be responsible for ending those violations. If it is powerless or does not wish to do so, the international community must play a role in putting an end to such violations.

The protection of civilians in armed conflicts is closely linked to the question of supplying humanitarian aid. At a time when we are witnessing a resurgence of activity by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in response to many humanitarian crises around the world, we must note that the international community has been unable to ensure the effective protection of civilians where those conflicts have emerged. As a result, civilians bear the brunt of any armed conflict, since the parties to conflict take no account of their needs and prevent the provision of humanitarian assistance in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Moreover, the parties in conflict hinder relief operations.

Therefore, we need to reach out to parties in conflict in order to prevent human rights violations, to strengthen international mechanisms of accountability, and to bring to perpetrators to justice. We must criminalize those violations. We should add that strengthening the protection-of-civilians aspect is part of mandates assigned to certain peacekeeping operations.

Every meeting in which we discuss the protection of civilians in armed conflict — every time — we think about the situation of the Palestinian people, who have suffered from violence and from the perpetual Israeli occupation, the siege of Gaza and the imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians in prisons in flagrant contradiction to international humanitarian law.

We are also witnessing humanitarian disasters in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. Yet the worst crisis is that of the Syrian people, who have suffered since the start of that conflict from the indiscriminate use of all types of weapons, particularly those that the use of against civilians is prohibited. At a time when the international community has managed to neutralize the use of chemical weapons, which left thousands of victims, the fact remains that the Syrian Government continues to use barrel bombs, dozens of which have fallen on urban centres.

The agreement between the parties to the conflict in Syria to extend the ceasefire for three additional days in the City of Homs augers well. It allows unimpeded access to United Nations humanitarian assistance to a greater number of besieged citizens, in line with international humanitarian law.

In that context, Kuwait stresses the need to bolster efforts to put an end to the violence and work towards a political solution to the crisis, in step with the aspirations of the Syrian people. We call on the Council to assume its responsibilities and not turn a blind eye to the major, grave human rights and international humanitarian law violations that continue to reflect everyday reality throughout the entire Syrian territory.

which are coupled with impeded access to humanitarian assistance.

In that regard, we would welcome the adoption of a draft resolution under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, given the deteriorating humanitarian situation. All signs indicate the lack of any genuine progress since the adoption by the Council of presidential statement S/PRST/2013/15, on 2 October 2013, or even since the two rounds of negotiations at the "Geneva II" Conference. In reality, the data indicate that the number of victims has increased from 100,000 to over 130,000. The number of refugees has increased from 2.2 million to 2.5 million, while the number of internally displaced persons has risen from 4 million to 6.5 million and to close to 250,000 persons find themselves under siege.

Aware of the scale of the Syrian crisis and its impact on international peace and security, Kuwait hosted the second donor conference for Syria, in January, with the participation of 69 States that pledged $2.4 billion. Kuwait also pledged $500 million to mitigate the suffering of the Syrian people.

In conclusion, my delegation reiterates the need for serious efforts aimed at guaranteeing respect for international humanitarian law and human rights in order to prevent human rights violations, particularly in armed conflict — as shown by my country's committed efforts and those of the international community — with a view to bolstering the principle of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Rishchynski (Canada): In too many places, civilians are deliberately targeted and continue to suffer from unspeakable violations. Canada welcomes this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in order to highlight situations where civilians are in danger and, more important, to identify opportunities where more can be done to ensure their protection in line with legal obligations.

As the 2013 report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/689) points out, parties to conflict, States, the United Nations and other partners all have a responsibility to do more to ensure that civilians enjoy the protection they so rightly deserve under appropriate laws.

Over the years, Canada has sought to encourage and facilitate serious work on improving how the United Nations prevents and responds to situations of armed conflict. We are principally concerned with addressing the protection needs of the most vulnerable in these contexts — including women, religious communities and children.

(*spoke in French*)

In conflict situations, women and girls, men and boys, can become victims of abuse. Women and girls in particular continue to face increased risks of sexual violence, including rape and early and forced marriage. Canada remains at the forefront of efforts to prevent and address violence against those most vulnerable, and in promoting their empowerment.

We must continue to work closely to strengthen efforts and coordination to prevent and respond to sexual violence, such as rape as a weapon of war, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion and enforced sterilizations. Even in times of conflict, the promotion of accountability, including by increasing the capacity to prosecute perpetrators of such acts, is important.

Canada remains committed to advocating for the rights of religious communities in situations of armed conflict, who are often persecuted for their beliefs. We are deeply concerned about situations where individuals from religious communities experience difficulty in their ability to practice their faith in peace. In the face of such injustice, including when pilgrims have been killed, churches or mosques attacked and religious leaders taken hostage, Canada has not been silent. And we have not sat idly by. We are speaking out on behalf of religious communities that are under threat. In that regard, we call on United Nations agencies to do more to ensure that the protection needs of vulnerable religious communities are addressed.

(*spoke in English*)

We wish to draw special attention today to the urgent need to address the impact of the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons, and in particular their impact on children. As the report of the Secretary-General highlights, in Syria and in far too many other conflicts, tens of thousands of civilians have been targeted or subjected to indiscriminate attacks, including the widespread use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas. Opportunities to strengthen civilian protection in that regard should include creating stronger political barriers to the use of indiscriminate explosive weapons and building recognition among parties to conflict that the use of such weapons should be avoided, particularly in densely populated areas.

We furthermore condemn the intentional targeting of schools, teachers and students as a tactic of war and the practice of using schools for military purposes during armed conflict. That practice has a clear negative impact on children's safety and access to education, and we call on parties to armed conflict to refrain from such military use of schools. We also encourage States that have not yet done so to take appropriate measures to restrict the use of schools for any military operations.

(*spoke in French*)

The conflict in Syria continues to have a devastating impact on the civilian population. Canada continues to call on all parties to conflict to adhere to their international obligations, as well as to provide full, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian actors seeking to provide emergency relief to affected populations.

We also demand, in the strongest terms possible, that parties refrain from attacking hospitals, medical facilities and health-care workers, which are protected under international law.

(*spoke in English*)

The crisis in Syria is but one of many examples where civilians are not only suffering from the devastating impacts of conflict, but are also being denied access to lifesaving humanitarian assistance and protection. In South Sudan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Afghanistan unacceptable constraints on access are undermining the ability of humanitarian workers to be able to reach those in need. We urgently call on all parties to conflict to ensure that humanitarian workers, relief goods and equipment are able to reach those in need of assistance. That includes the freedom of movement of humanitarian workers and the establishment of simple and effective procedures for administrative and logistical arrangements pertaining to customs, visas and travel authorizations.

You may rest assured, Madam President, that Canada will remain committed to working with the international community to protect the world's most vulnerable and to ensure that those responsible for violations are held accountable for their actions and brought to justice.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes the holding, under your presidency, Madam President, of this debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the adoption of a new presidential statement (S/PRST/2014/3) to reinforce the legal arsenal resulting from the Council's work in this field. The Security Council addresses this important issue on a regular basis, and that is, sadly, entirely justified, given the turbulent international environment, which is of concern to us all. Moreover, the relevance of this debate was aptly reflected in the briefings this morning by Ms. Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; and Mr. Yves Daccord, Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The picture painted in the tenth report of the Secretary-General shows that the current state of the protection of civilians "does not give much cause for optimism" (*S/2013/689, para. 8*). Civilians in many parts of the world continue to suffer the tragic and devastating consequences of armed conflict and are regularly targeted during attacks and indiscriminate reprisals committed in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The tragic events in the Central African Republic are the most recent reminder of the heavy toll paid by civilians, in particular women and children, in the armed conflicts imposed on them. To avoid violence and vengeful acts, civilians are often obliged to flee or seek refuge in neighbouring countries, with all the consequences that can have for the physical and mental health of those vulnerable people.

We welcome the progress made by the international community in protecting civilians who have been held hostage by conflicts, and we are pleased to take part in those efforts within the various peacekeeping operations of the United Nations.

The deadly nature of conflicts and the sophistication of the weapons used in them endangers not only civilian populations but also humanitarian workers and journalists, who are often caught in the crossfire between the warring sides and prevented from carrying out their noble mission of assisting civilians exposed to armed conflict and make their plight known. In that respect, I would like to reiterate our condemnation of acts of aggression and intimidation perpetrated against humanitarian personnel and to pay due tribute to the courage of the men and women of the United Nations who are carrying out their tasks in often very difficult conditions, sometimes risking their very lives.

While the protection of civilians is one of the major concerns of peacekeeping operations that have a mandate to that end, the success of that humanitarian task is dependent on coordination with the host country, which has, as has been stated many times in this debate, the primary responsibility to protect its own civilians. Success also depends on the mission's mandate being in line with the resources at its disposal to prevent possible atrocities against civilians and to guarantee optimal protection for them in times of conflict.

The protection of civilians in armed conflict also requires a comprehensive approach that reflects the multidimensional legal, humanitarian and security aspects. There must be a clear division of the mandates and roles entrusted to the various stakeholders operating in complex situations and effective coordination between the stakeholders.

Moreover, the protection of civilians in the framework of peacekeeping operations mandated to that end requires a periodic assessment of the implementation process for those strategies with a view to identifying gaps and shortcomings and learning positive lessons that can improve the implementation of such strategies.

Finally, the protection of civilians must go hand-in-hand with the fight against trafficking in weapons and their proliferation and ensuring respect for arms embargoes, when those are put in place by the Security Council.

As also stated many times in this debate, humanitarian work for the protection of civilians must be clearly dissociated from political goals and protected from becoming an instrument of any of the parties to the conflict.

In his report, the Secretary-General rightly stresses that humanitarian operations are often hindered by host country restrictions on the freedom of movement of humanitarian personnel and refugees seeking assistance and protection. The presence of non-State armed groups in refugee camps, in violation of the fundamental principles enshrined in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and the infiltration by armed elements of those populations make the implementation of any refugee protection strategy an illusion and is a challenge that needs to be dealt with. The duty to protect those vulnerable populations requires that they be guarded from any act of violence or intimidation and that their freedom of movement be guaranteed. The protection of civilians requires, of course, greater respect for international law, international humanitarian law and refugee rights by all stakeholders. However, while much progress has been made at the normative level, much remains to be done on the ground and in practice to ensure the effective implementation of commitments undertaken in that field.

In conclusion, we should stress the importance of the preventive aspect of the protection of civilians as it enhances the capacities of the countries concerned and the rule of law, guarantees good governance, lays the basis for a culture of human rights and helps in the implementation of early-warning mechanisms able to detect pre-conflict situations and prevent them from turning into open and deadly conflicts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Mr. Logar (Slovenia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the States members of the Human Security Network, namely, Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Panama, Switzerland, Thailand and my own country, Slovenia, and on behalf of the Republic of South Africa as an observer.

The Network is a cross-regional group of States created in the context of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and promoting human security as a people-centered, comprehensive and prevention-oriented approach for achieving peace, development and human rights. The protection of civilians in armed conflicts is a core matter for the Network.

I would like to start this statement by expressing our gratitude to the Lithuanian presidency for organizing this debate and for the concept note (S/2014/74, annex), and by thanking the briefers for their contributions to this debate, which is the first one since the Secretary-General's most recent report on the protection on civilians in armed conflicts (S/2013/689), of November 2013.

As the Secretary-General's report indicates, despite the efforts undertaken and the existing legal framework, the current state of the protection of civilians leaves little room for optimism. We remain concerned about ongoing conflicts around the world, especially in the

Syrian Arab Republic, the Central African Republic and South Sudan. Civilian populations continue to account for the majority of casualties in armed conflicts, and that is why it is imperative to continue to discuss, on a regular basis, mechanisms or ways to better ensure the security and dignity of civilians affected by armed conflicts.

In that respect, the Network welcomes the initiative recently launched by the Secretary-General, entitled "Rights up front", which contains important actions to strengthen the role and response of the United Nations in this field. We hope that the multiplier effect of the change in institutional culture alluded to by the Secretary-General becomes a reality.

This debate provides an opportunity to look into the core challenges to enhancing the protection of civilians. The first challenge is compliance by all the parties to a conflict, including non-State armed groups, with international humanitarian and human rights law. The law and rules must be respected in order to guarantee the protection of civilians. Full, timely and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance continues to be a sine qua non requirement for the relief and protection of affected populations. States must comply with their obligation to allow and facilitate access for humanitarian relief and the freedom of movement of humanitarian personnel.

The Network reiterates its call on all parties to an armed conflict to refrain from using explosive weapons with a wide impact area in populated areas. It stresses the importance of establishing mechanisms to track civilian casualties so as to understand the impact of military operations on civilian populations and adjust such action. An important step was taken in April 2013 with the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty and that agreement's prohibition of transfers of arms or items covered by it if the transferring State knows, at the time of authorization, that the arms or items will be used to commit serious crimes. We remain especially concerned about the use of explosive weapons, in particular improvised explosive devices, and stress the need to enhance compliance with international humanitarian law.

The second task is to enhance the role of peacekeeping and other missions. The Network shares the view expressed in the Secretary-General's report that mandating peacekeeping missions to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence is one of the most significant actions taken by the Security Council. In that regard, we underline the importance of providing missions not only with clear and achievable mandates but also with sufficient resources and capabilities to fulfil those mandates. The Network views political dialogue, physical protection and the establishment of a protective environment as concrete and specific steps for the effective implementation of mission mandates.

The third challenge is accountability. States have the obligation to comply with international humanitarian and human rights law and to investigate and prosecute any serious crime committed within its borders. In that regard, we condemn sexual and gender-based violence, including the use of sexual violence as a military tactic. Impunity is not an option. It encourages perpetrators to continue their atrocious acts. The fight against impunity should be a common effort, in which the affected State delivers and ensures the conditions to bring about justice and the international community provides technical assistance and resources to such States. The Network stresses the importance of commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions, which can substantiate alleged violations, thus opening the way to a possible referral to the International Criminal Court or cooperation with the Court or similar mechanisms.

We mentioned that there is little room for optimism. However, we would like to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge the efforts and commitment of United Nations peacekeepers. The concrete actions, such as those taken by peacekeeping missions with protection-of-civilians mandates, are encouraging. Therefore, as we have said, it is important that such missions have the necessary resources and capacities to protect the lives of civilians in armed conflicts effectively and in a timely manner.

We consider it to be of the utmost importance that the Council remain seized of the question on the protection of civilian in armed conflict and discuss the topic biannually.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Mr. Ruiz (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to begin by thanking you, Madam President, for organizing this debate and for preparing the concept note (S/2014/74, annex) that guides it. I would also like to thank Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Ms. Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; and Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their presentations.

Colombia values the opening of this forum for consideration, which enables us to address the importance of the protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict through peacekeeping operations and other relevant activities. Colombia believes it appropriate to recall that the success of peacekeeping operations is evident when, having laid the foundations for lasting peace, empowered the national authorities and integrated the protection of civilians as an international duty and obligation, such operations are no longer required.

We share the concern over the situation that the civilian population faces in situations of armed conflict in some parts of the world and over the repeated non-compliance by parties to conflicts with their obligation to respect and protect civilians in accordance with international law. We agree that all parties to a conflict should respect international law, that the protection of civilians must be ensured and that there must be accountability when the law is violated.

In that context, Colombia, as a troop-contributing country, supports the role of peacekeeping operations in such tasks and is convinced of the need for clarity both in the concept and the operability when carrying out protection of civilian activities. The Secretariat has been working tirelessly on such tasks.

In order to ensure successful implementation, we believe that it is essential to pay particular attention to the planning and mandate-development phases, to the allocation of adequate resources and to ensuring the training of troops to the necessary standard.

In that regard, the Security Council should strengthen its ability to gather accurate information on the situation of civilians before a mandate is prepared and to monitor progress in the field during its implementation. To that end, The Security Council will need to use indicators on the situation of civilians in places where it plans to undertake peacekeeping operations, request reports on developments in civilian protection work and utilize tools such as the Arria Formula and interactive dialogue for a more in-depth analysis and the sharing of lessons learned.

My Government is aware of the positive role that the various accountability mechanisms play in strengthening the protection of civilians during armed conflicts. Without closing the door to negotiation that provides combatants with incentives to demobilize and return to civilian life, for Colombia, the pursuit of peace and reconciliation includes justice, reparation for the victims, reconstruction of the truth and the guarantee on non-recurrence. The implementation of United Nations mandates with a protection-of-civilians aspect must be accompanied by the political will of States and their ability to meet their responsibilities towards the civilian population.

The Colombian State notes the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict of 22 November 2013 (S/2013/689), whose recommendations my country will consider in line with their relevance.

My delegation also wishes to reiterate the importance that United Nations agencies fully understand the work of national Governments in the area of the protection of civilians in prioritizing their work and informing the Organization of specific situations. Verified, objective, balanced and unbiased information includes not only identifying the gaps and challenges but also acknowledging the progress in each country.

The United Nations should promote compliance with international humanitarian law by non-State armed groups and carefully determine the mechanisms to achieve that goal. In our view, each situation is different and should be addressed by taking its particular circumstances into account.

Finally, my Government understands and shares the concern about humanitarian access. It believes that international assistance in that area must follow the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence enshrined in General Assembly resolution 46/182. Following those principles, while guiding collective efforts to support national authorities, acquire much greater significance when cooperation is directed at countries that enjoy democratic institutions and lawfully established Governments.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan): I am pleased to see you preside over the Security Council this month, Madam President. I would also like to thank you for convening this important debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

I also express my thanks to Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and

Emergency Relief Coordinator; Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations; Ms. Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; and Mr. Yves Daccord, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their useful briefings today.

The protection of civilians is of paramount importance to the Government of Afghanistan. The Afghan people expected a long-awaited peace when the Taliban regime came to an end following decades of war, unprecedented destruction and loss of life. Yet despite joint stabilization efforts towards peace and security, the suffering of the Afghan people continues. The security situation remains today precarious, and incidents have in fact escalated in intensity since 2009.

Afghan civilians are targeted with guns and bombs by enemies who measure success in terms of the blood spilled and life lost. Women, children, Government officials, journalists, religious leaders and judicial authorities are at risk as they go about their daily lives, shopping at a bazaar, visiting a friend or commuting to work. They are attacked in villages, on public roads, in restaurants, Government offices, courthouses and mosques.

With total and utter disregard for civilian life, the brutal terrorist campaign by the Taliban and other extremist groups affect ordinary Afghans most profoundly. The Taliban are responsible for the overwhelming majority of civilian casualties in Afghanistan, causing thousands of deaths in 2013 alone, which represents a sharp increase from previous years.

The brutal campaign opened a murderous era in Afghanistan's history — devastating in terms both of its acute impact on the Afghan people and of its savagery. Terrorists' tactics are a horrific manifestation of man's inhumanity to man, of which graphic video footage of beheadings posted on Taliban websites, the recent heinous attack on a popular restaurant in Kabul and the cold-blooded murders and violence against women and children are but a few harrowing examples.

The Council condemned Taliban attacks in the strongest terms six times last year, stressing that terrorism in all its forms was criminal and unjustifiable and underscoring the need to bring its perpetrators to justice. It is clear that the Taliban show flagrant disregard for international law as well as the basic tenets and principles of Islam.

We note with deep concern an increase in the indiscriminate use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by armed insurgent groups in the past year. IEDs remain the leading cause of civilian deaths and injuries, accounting for 34 per cent of all civilian casualties in Afghanistan. To address this menace, a national counter-IED strategy was instituted by presidential decree in 2012. We are working to strengthen our counter-IED capabilities and the related training programmes by the International Security Assistance Force for the Afghan National Security Forces — a further important step in minimizing the danger posed by such weapons.

Tragically, ground engagements in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations have resulted in the deaths and injuries of civilians. It is unfortunate that Afghans have lost their lives during operations by international and national forces that aimed to protect them. In that regard, the Afghan Government has repeatedly called on international military forces to take all the necessary measures to stop the loss of Afghan civilian life. Important steps have been taken in that regard in recent years.

With Afghan forces now at the forefront of protecting the Afghan people from terrorist attacks, we see situations in which civilians are caught in the crossfire of ground engagements with the enemy. One life lost is one too many, and, with that sentiment in mind, Afghan forces are strongly committed to the protection of civilians. Stabilization efforts are guided by their sense of responsibility, sobriety and duty to their fellow Afghans.

It is clear that the surest way to protect the lives, honour and dignity of citizens is to end the cycle of violence that harms innocent civilians. In that regard, achieving peace and security in Afghanistan requires the following three key components: first, international assistance throughout the next decade to support the Afghan capacity to counter terrorist campaigns against the Afghan people; secondly, the elimination of terrorist sanctuaries that fuel the cycle of violence; and, thirdly, vigorous pursuit of our Afghan-led peace and reconciliation process, intended to engage those ready to renounce violence and contribute responsibly to their homeland. Effective regional and international cooperation is key to the successful outcome of the process.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia.

Mr. Nazarian (Armenia): At the outset, let me tell you, Madam President how pleased we are to see Lithuania presiding over the Security Council. I thank you for convening this open debate on an issue that is of considerable importance and great concern to many Member States. My delegation also joins previous speakers in thanking the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Under-Secretaries-General for Humanitarian Affairs and for Peacekeeping Operations, and the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for their briefings, which very informatively shed light on the topic before us today.

We share the concerns raised in this Chamber regarding the innocent civilians who, sadly, often constitute an overwhelming majority of the victims in armed conflict. In particular, women and children continue to be the most vulnerable groups, subjected to various forms of extreme violence, resulting in grave humanitarian crises with huge population displacement in various parts of the world.

It is encouraging that the Council has made several important decisions relating to the protection needs of vulnerable groups during armed conflicts. It is also important that we recognize the humanitarian challenges in post-conflict situations. The effective implementation of protection tasks involves a broad range of actors. Local authorities must be engaged in mediation and resolution talks. It is equally important that those authorities fully engage with the United Nations and other humanitarian actors.

The unimpeded access of international aid actors, including the ICRC, non-governmental organizations working on demining and charities tending to vulnerable and needy populations, is a matter of vital importance and must be unconditionally guaranteed and sustained. The parties to a conflict should ensure that the most efficient means are available for reaching people in need with humanitarian assistance and protection, including in situations where thiat involves humanitarian and/or monitoring operations that cross lines of contact or international borders.

As a country that has suffered aggression and imposed war, we fully recognize that protecting people from mass atrocities and violence is an overarching responsibility that must bring together all of the critical functions of the United Nations and other international organizations.

Today, we remain gravely concerned by the humanitarian impact of the use of force. As a result of this unacceptable policy and practice, the situations of civilians living near borders and lines of contact are being further compounded. During previous debates on this subject, my delegation raised concerns regarding the border impact of snipers on civilian populations and facilities. Violent incidents affecting the lives of civilians must cease immediately.//Armenia advocates the need to end...

Armenia advocates the need to end all violence and provocations, including the kidnapping of civilians. We strongly believe that fundamental and lasting solutions to conflicts can be achieved only through peaceful means, based on the principles of international law and within internationally agreed formats. We emphasize once again that military force will not resolve conflicts and only prolong the suffering and hardships endured by people living in regions blighted by conflicts. Only a peaceful negotiated settlement can allow an entire region to move beyond the status quo towards a secure and prosperous future.

It is important that the Council be focused on the protection of civilians within the overall process of the peaceful resolution of disputes. Our approach must be built on the understanding that any comprehensive resolution should impartially and fully address the root causes of a conflict under discussion in order to prevent its renewal in the future and should provide reliable and adequate security protection guarantees to the populations concerned, thereby ensuring sustainable peace and development.

Therefore, Armenia welcomes Lithuania's initiative to hold this debate, which offers a valuable opportunity to evaluate the progress on the implementation on previously adopted resolutions dealing with the issue of protection of civilians and highlight the core challenges and priorities for further united actions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Umemoto (Japan): At the outset, let me express my sincere congratulations to Lithuania on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to thank Ms. Amos, Mr. Ladsous, Ms. Pillay and Mr. Daccord for their respective briefings.

Japan concurs and associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. In my statement, I would like to focus on the most urgent and humanitarian aspects of the issues highlighted in the concept note (S/2014/74, annex) prepared by Lithuania.

The lives of countless civilians are in deadly peril in such places as Syria, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan and Yemen. In contexts such as those, ensuring safe, timely and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian goods and equipment and access by humanitarian workers is of the utmost necessity and is essential to the effectiveness of the humanitarian assistance itself. However, in those regions, the efforts of humanitarian workers to reach people in need of assistance and protection are extremely hampered.

The issue of humanitarian access is right in front of us. According to the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/689), between May 2012 and August 2013, 134 humanitarian workers were killed, 172 were wounded and 149 were abducted. The kidnapping of humanitarian workers is reported to have quadrupled over the past 10 years. Such attacks against humanitarian workers is really deplorable and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

It is indeed regrettable that Governments or non-governmental military groups frequently obstruct, delay or prevent United Nations humanitarian operations in an arbitrary manner within the territories they control. The serious impact of those cases on civilians requires the continued and urgent attention of the Security Council to act in a visible and concrete way in order to protect humanitarian workers, ensure humanitarian access and mitigate situations of civilians in armed conflict.

Another issue that requires the Security Council's immediate attention is the use of explosive weapons, including improvised explosive devices, in populated areas. According to the Secretary-General's report, in 2012, more than 34,700 people were killed or injured by explosive weapons; some 60 per cent of those casualties were caused by improvised explosive devices. Who would not be dismayed by those numbers? The Security Council must make every effort to find possible ways to decrease that lamentable number by looking into the serious consideration of voices from the field where civilians are faced with the real threat of those weapons.

While welcoming and recognizing the need to discuss normative and institutional mechanisms to solve those issues, let me stress once again that ongoing crises on the ground around the world require the international community, particularly the Security Council, to take immediate actions and measures to improve the situation in any possible way. Although the international community has developed various mechanisms and tools in order to protect civilians in armed conflict, it is difficult in reality to successfully implement them. We must not only establish mechanisms and tools, but also analyse underlying factors that hamper the smooth functioning of those mechanism and tools so that we can increase their effectiveness.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uganda.

Mr. Nduhuura (Uganda): I congratulate you, Madam President, and the delegation of Lithuania on your leadership of the Security Council this month. I also thank you for organizing and presiding over this debate on this very crucial topic. We thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay and Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross Yves Daccord for their insightful briefings.

In contemporary armed conflicts, innocent civilians often constitute an overwhelming majority of victims and have at times been deliberately targeted. The most vulnerable populations at risk include women and children, who are often killed, raped and sexually abused or forced to become soldiers. Survivors are often displaced, taking refuge in camps where they are often defenceless against armed attacks and harassment.

My delegation would like to underscore the importance of protecting civilians in armed conflict. We would like therefore to commend the Security Council for its continuous prioritization of its engagement on this role. I wish to emphasize the following fundamental points in the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

First, it is essential to ensure a quick, effective and concerted response, especially in situations of armed conflict, in order to protect civilians, prevent atrocities, restore law and order and provide humanitarian assistance. Today's armed conflicts often take place in densely populated areas, with extensive civilian losses and damage to civilian buildings and infrastructure as a result. That means there is an urgent need to consider whether the interpretation of the basic international humanitarian law rules of distinction between military targets and civilians and proportionality need to be further strengthened.

We have unfortunately witnessed many instances on the African continent where delayed action by State authorities, the region or the Security Council have resulted in a devastating loss of life and untold suffering to populations. The African Union is working towards the operationalization of African standby brigades to be able to respond quickly and robustly in situations of violent conflict. In that regard, we look forward to support from the international community.

Secondly, there is a need to emphasize the importance of mediation as a recourse in the peaceful settlement of conflicts, even after the outbreak of conflict. As we know, protection broadly encompasses activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of all individuals in accordance with international law, a task that is difficult in armed conflicts. We underscore the need for the parties to a conflict to seek political solutions through dialogue, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement or the use of regional and international arrangements in accordance with Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations.

We call upon the Security Council to give top priority to conflict prevention and mediation under Chapter VI of the Charter. For example, Uganda's role as mediator of the dialogue between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Mouvement du 23 mars under the auspices of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region de-escalated the conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and saved lives. My delegation is convinced that exerting greater efforts to peacefully resolve disputes will reduce threats to peace and security. From that perspective, greater use of mediation should be a part of the Council's overall response to the increased magnitude and complexity of peacekeeping as conflicts become more multi-layered.

Thirdly, there is a need to enhance early-warning and response mechanisms in the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The United Nations has improved its operational innovations in civilian protection, which include practical steps and guidance on civilian protection as well as highlighting best practices. However, there is still more work to be done to ensure the protection of civilians on the ground, with a focus on preventive mechanisms to deter damage, destruction and loss of life as a result of armed conflict.

In conclusion, my delegation calls for regular interaction, coordination and consultation among the Security Council, regional and subregional organizations and host States, with a view to devising more effective strategies for protecting civilians in armed conflict. Since regional organizations have a comparative advantage through increased complementarities to undertake efforts to ensure protection of civilians in armed conflict, the benefits of such coordination are enormous.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Hassan (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to congratulate the delegation of Lithuania on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month. I also wish to express our great appreciation for the convening of today's debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. And I thank the Lithuanian delegation for its concept note on today's item (S/2014/74, annex), in particular because 15 years have elapsed since the Secretary-General presented his first report on the subject to the Security Council (S/1999/957), which led to the adoption of the first relevant resolution (resolution 1265 (1999)). We hope that regular deliberations within the Council on the subject will allow us come up with an objective, holistic vision of how best to protect civilians, all the while avoiding politicizing the issue and staying away from double standards.

Confronting the root causes of conflicts and pushing for comprehensive and lasting political settlements are the best guarantee for the protection of civilians. The concept note is quite right when it says that the vast majority of victims in armed conflicts are civilians. But it is necessary in that respect to draw attention to an important truth, namely, that civilians in very many conflict zones are victims primarily of rebel movements that take up weapons in order to victimize civilians, women and children, to the point where the international community becomes indignant and seeks to intervene in an armed conflict zone. The best example in that regard — those who are responsible — are the rebel movements that are undermining the peace process in Darfur.

When we talk of the protection of civilians, it is necessary to prioritize the success of peacekeeping operations and political settlements whereby rebel groups are pressured to join political processes and enter into peaceful negotiations, as opposed to resorting to the use of military force or attempts to deceive international public opinion. Mr. Ladsous said quite rightly this morning in English that peacekeeping operations could not impose peace. Indeed, if there is no peace to maintain, peacekeeping operations, no matter what their capacities are, will not achieve their goals in that respect. It is therefore necessary to very swiftly implement development projects, reconstruction projects, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration projects and quick-impact projects so that internally displaced persons can return to their homes and enjoy stability.

We call on the Security Council and the international community to support the Sudanese Government to achieve peace in Darfur. We also call on the Council to send a strong message to those who refuse to sign the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur and to the rebels in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile regions to lay down their weapons and join the peace process.

In her statement, Ms. Amos spoke of the situation in those two regions and mentioned aerial bombardments by the Sudanese Air Force — remarks that I would like to correct. I hope Ms. Amos can hear us: that was not the case. The truth is that rebel movements in those two zones continued to violate all the unilateral ceasefire announcements issued by the Sudanese Government. The last ceasefire was intended to take place between February and November of last year, but the rebel movements did not respect it, and civilians and United Nations facilities, in particular in Kadugli, were targeted by the rebel movements in question.

The principle of the protection of civilians in armed conflict is a very noble goal to which we all aspire. What troubles us are attempts to instrumentalize that objective with a view to very specific political ends. For example, with respect to the principle of the responsibility to protect, which we wish to endorse from this podium, even if it appears in the Millennium Declaration, it nevertheless remains open to very different interpretations. It is in contradiction with a principle enshrined in the Charter, namely, respect for national sovereignty and States' primary responsibility for the protection of their civilians. We need to reiterate in that regard that the right to protection for civilians in armed conflict is an integral part of a comprehensive interdependent regime of rights and duties affirmed by the Millennium Declaration, such as combating poverty and preventing conflict by dealing with root causes.

In conclusion, we hope that the Council will continue to discuss this matter in an objective manner so that we can protect civilians in all conflict zones.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Kushneruk (Ukraine): First of all, let me join previous speakers in thanking the Lithuanian delegation for organizing today's open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts through United Nations peacekeeping and other relevant activities. We find it to be timely and topical.

While taking note of the few positive developments outlined in the Secretary-General's latest report on the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2013/689), the delegation of Ukraine remains concerned with the fact that civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in current conflicts. They are regularly targeted and subjected to indiscriminate attacks and other violations by parties to conflict.

The protection of civilians is a mandated task that requires coordinated actions in all spheres of peacekeeping operations activities, including the United Nations police component. While such protection is a core element of international policing, it also requires close alignment with the work of peacekeeping operations in the strategy for protecting civilians.

United Nations police provide operational support to host-State police on the protection of civilians under imminent threat. In addition, United Nations police assist in planning and conducting operations and investigations and in training the host-State police forces to perform crucial protection functions, which, inter alia, include maintaining a secure environment in camps of internally displaced persons.

The ongoing conflict in South Sudan has led to the need for accommodations for thousands of civilians in United Nations shelters. Police officers of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan were directly involved in the protection of civilians in those camps by maintaining public order and conducting physical checks. With the third largest contingent of individual police officers there, Ukraine reaffirms its commitment to further support the United Nations Mission in South

Sudan and is considering the possibility of increasing the number of its police officers.

Ukraine strongly believes that host-State police can also contribute to the protection of civilians by preventing and overcoming direct physical violence, in particular sexual abuse. The police of the host State should receive special training to be able to perform such duties.

I would like to emphasize that special attention needs to be given to vulnerable groups in society, including children, women and elder persons; national, ethnic, religious and other minorities; and displaced populations, when defining and implementing the relevant activities in peacekeeping operations and when identifying security needs.

Ukraine has always been an active supporter of United Nations efforts aimed at protecting women and girls in armed conflicts. Our Government strongly supports all Security Council resolutions on women. We welcome the commitments of the Group of Eight on enhancing efforts to address impunity for sexual violence in conflicts, including its endorsement of the development of an international protocol on the investigation and documentation of sexual violence in conflict. In September 2013, Ukraine signed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict.

We consider demining operations to be another important area related to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. Ukraine has extensive experience in demining and possesses modern technologies in that area. Our advanced logistics bases allow the training of highly skilled specialists within a short period of time. Ukrainian mine-clearance engineers are widely recognized in the world, including in the Balkan region, Africa and the Middle East. Our units operate under the standards and operational procedures of the United Nations, and we are ready to provide technical support and to share our experience within United Nations peacekeeping missions.

Turning again to South Sudan, I would like to draw the Council's attention to recent developments that have revealed the absence of the means required to carry out quick-response rescue operations of civilians in cases of emergency. That proves that there is a pressing need to take decisions on the rapid concentration of rescue units, especially military and civil helicopters, in a particular place to fulfil rescue operations.

Last December, three of our helicopters received gunfire while rescuing civilians and United Nations employees in South Sudan. Thanks to the pilots' professionalism, there were no human casualties. However, it had become evident that, in order to avoid, or at least to significantly decrease, possible casualties in the future, the United Nations must equip rescue helicopters with additional protective features, such as bulletproof bottoms, antiballistic and antimissile protection, reinforced rescue hoists and on-board fixtures for medical equipment. Night-vision goggles should be available for night operations. For example, we believe that the rescue helicopters mentioned could have avoided gunfire if the team had performed their operation at night using night-vision goggles.

We think that United Nations helicopters should be versatile, multifunctional and rapidly convertible into any version suitable to the flight task — passenger or cargo transportation, medical or casualty evacuation or search and rescue operations. A professional team of rescuers and medical staff should be included in the crew; plus an ambulance should be available to transport injured people to the nearest medical facility.

We believe that such modifications to helicopters would assist United Nations peacekeeping missions in providing protection to civilians in armed conflicts in a more efficient and safe manner. In November 2013, Ukraine held a special briefing with a presentation on the functionality of United Nations helicopters. In March, we are planning to convene another presentation focused on a United Nations multitask and convertible helicopter capable of protecting civilians in armed conflicts.

The President: I now give the floor to the Deputy Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser (Palestine): At the outset, Madam President, I wish to thank you and the delegation of Lithuania for convening today's debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, an issue of immense importance to the State of Palestine.

We also commend the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for the comprehensive briefings delivered today and for their tireless efforts to promote the protection and well-being of civilians in armed conflict.

While significant efforts have been made to prevent and respond to violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in conflict situations, the Secretary-General noted in his latest report that "[t]he current state of the protection of civilians leaves little room for optimism" (*S/2013/689, para.8*) which was compellingly confirmed by the briefers in today's debate.

The failure of States and parties to respect and ensure respect of their legal obligations remains widespread, and civilians continue to bear the burden of war and violence and to suffer its brutal consequences in a tragic manner.

One clear and persistent example of the failure to respect, and to ensure respect for, the law is the case of the Palestinian civilian population living under Israel's occupation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. For more than four decades, any and all of the legal safeguards for the protection to which civilians are entitled under international humanitarian law have been deliberately ignored by Israel, the occupying Power, leaving Palestinian civilians devoid of protection of not only their physical bodies and lives, but also their well-being and human dignity. It is a situation that has inflicted upon them massive suffering, trauma and hardship, for generation after generation.

The protection provisions of international law, including the Geneva Conventions — in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, which includes provisions explicitly aimed at ensuring the safety of civilians in armed conflict, including specific provisions for civilians under foreign occupation — the Additional Protocols to the Conventions, the international covenants on human Rights, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the relevant United Nations resolutions are all clear and are applicable to the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Nevertheless, not a day has gone by in which our situation has not been characterized as extremely volatile and in which grave transgressions of international humanitarian law and the protection provisions have been committed by the occupying Power. That includes the period covered by the Secretary-General's report, which witnessed a significant increase in Palestinian civilian causalities, including among women, children and the elderly.

Besides the complete absence of protection for those Palestinians who have been killed, including by air strikes and explosive weapons in densely populated areas, as in the Israeli military aggressions against Gaza in 2008, in 2009 and in November 2012, Palestinians also continue to be victims of appalling human rights violations and crimes, suffering physical and psychological harm, dispossession, forced displacement, imprisonment and detention, torture, exploitation, hunger, poverty, disease and the destruction of their communities. Even the right to peaceful protest has been lethally violated by the occupying forces. International law clearly forbids such brutality against civilians, and such actions, wilfully perpetrated, constitute war crimes. The Palestinian civilian population also remains vulnerable to rampant settler terror and violence, which has intensified in the recent period.

Moreover, in the Gaza Strip, the devastating impact of the illegal Israeli blockade and the repercussions of the destruction and displacement inflicted by sequential acts Israeli military aggression have continued to impact every human right and to disrupt every aspect of civilian life, deepening the humanitarian crisis. The blockade constitutes collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population in Gaza, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Palestinians living in Gaza not only need protection for their lives, but also protection from such deliberately destructive policies, which are disfiguring an entire society.

The international community's failure to hold Israel accountable for its violations and crimes has, regrettably, reinforced that lawlessness, permitting it to continue using military force and collective punishment against the defenceless Palestinian people under its occupation and, in essence, absolving it from its legal obligations as an occupying Power. As the Secretary-General states in his report,

> "The prevalence of impunity in many States experiencing, or that have experienced, conflict allows war crimes and serious human rights violations to thrive, undermines the fabric of societies and prevents the development of lasting solutions, which contributes to instability." (*ibid, para. 60*)

Israel's impunity in the context of its foreign occupation of another people and their land has prevailed for nearly five decades due to the inaction and selectivity of the international community, including the Security Council. It is high time for that to be rectified.

The Security Council has the duty to determine and undertake appropriate measures to protect civilian populations, and that unequivocally includes the protection of the Palestinian people. To continue doing nothing in the face of such crimes is unacceptable and will only allow for the cycle of impunity to persist.

I would be remiss if I did not convey, yet again, the grave concerns of the State of Palestine about the critical humanitarian situation of Palestine refugees in Syria, who also continue to suffer death and injury, the destruction of their homes and shelters, dispossession and massive displacement. The plight of the thousands of refugees trapped the Yarmouk camp in particular is inhumane. Urgent international attention is required to alleviate their plight and that of all civilians suffering in the conflict. The siege and starvation of innocent civilians as a combat method is a grave breach of international humanitarian law and cannot be permitted or justified under any circumstance. We urgently appeal for sustained, adequate and safe humanitarian access to Yarmouk and to all civilians in need, in line with the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law, including the unimpeded delivery of emergency food and medical assistance.

Furthermore in that regard, we reiterate our appeals for the exertion of all possible efforts to ensure the protection of the Palestine refugees and all civilians in Syria in accordance with international humanitarian law, until a political solution can be found to end the tragic conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Given the hour, I shall make a brief statement. My complete statement will be circulated in the Chamber and posted on the website of the Spanish Mission.

I would like to begin my statement by congratulating you, Madam President, on your presidency of the Security Council, which you assumed just one month after becoming a member of the Council. I also commend the focus you have chosen for your presidency in choosing the issues of the relationship between the Council and regional bodies, the rule of law and the protection of civilians. Indeed, today's debate on the protection of civilians is good proof of that. My delegation believes that protection of civilians should be integrated in the Council's agenda, as today's debate clearly demonstrates.

We welcome the adoption, this morning, of presidential statement S/PRST/2014/3.

The Spanish delegation fully associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

The President's excellent concept note (S/2014/74, annex) calls on us to clearly focus in this debate on the implementation of protection-of-civilians mandates, and that is what I shall do.

In the view of the delegation of Spain, it is crucial to have clear and achievable mandates in order subsequently to carry out an objective analysis of the situation on the ground. My delegation believes that peacekeeping operations must have sufficient and adequate resources, bearing in mind that such resources may often have to be adapted in the face of unforeseen situations.

In addition, we must be fully aware of people's expectations occasioned by peacekeeping mandates. In that context, I cannot fail to recall here in the Chamber the situation taking place in South Sudan.

Moreover, we should decisively reinvigorate and strengthen the follow-up and assessment mechanisms of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. It is crucial that we glean the lessons learned so that future operations can be more effective.

In today's debate, my delegation would like to call attention to three very special situations concerning the protection of civilians: first, the use of cluster bombs and explosives in urban centres; secondly, the severe impact of conflicts on the elderly, women and persons with disabilities, but especially children; and, thirdly, attacks against medical facilities and personnel and humanitarian personnel.

That brings me to the situation in Syria, which I cannot fail to mention. I share much of what has been said today in the Chamber about the conflict in Syria, particularly when it comes to the Council assuming its responsibility and taking the measures necessary to ensure that presidential statement S/PRST/2013/15, of 2 October 2013, is truly implemented. I also take this opportunity to call upon all parties to conflict to end attacks directly targeting humanitarian personnel.

My country fully supports the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2013/689). Nevertheless, I wish to highlight two — first, the importance of unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance. That is essential in ensuring adequate protection for civilians. The second is the need for genuine accountability. That is one of the true pillars of an effective legal system, and the only way to effectively fight against impunity.

Appropriate training for armed forces is another fundamental aspect in the protection of civilians in armed conflict. In that context, I would highlight that Spain warmly welcomed the adoption of resolution 2106 (2013), which underscores the importance of training regarding gender-based violence and the deployment of protection advisers.

In our opinion, another important element of this debate is mediation and preventive diplomacy. Spain is an active member of the Group of Friends of Mediation, with an important mediation initiative in the Mediterranean region on which we would like to collaborate with the Council.

In conclusion, Spain's experience in the protection of civilians is based on our country's extensive participation in peacekeeping operations. It has taught us that we must place the protection of civilians at the centre of our efforts in matters of peace and security and make concerted progress on mechanisms and concrete actions for the effective implementation of such protection.

Rest assured that my country will continue to actively participate in all efforts of the international community to improve the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): First of all, I would like to thank the Lithuanian presidency for convening this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Fifteen years ago, the Security Council adopted its first resolution on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (resolution 1265 (1999)), which, inter alia, explicitly mandated a United Nations peacekeeping operation to protect civilians. Indeed, since then a number of important efforts have been undertaken to increase the attention of the international community, develop a normative basis and enhance the implementation of protection mandates by peacekeeping operations.

At the same time, numerous challenges remain, and civilians continue to account for the vast majority of casualties in armed conflicts. As the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the topic (S/2013/689) acknowledges, the current state of the protection of civilians leaves little room for optimism.

The increasing brutality of armed conflicts and the changing nature of warfare nowadays give rise to a need for greater measures for protection at the national and international levels. More resolute and targeted measures are required to end impunity for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community. As the Secretary-General notes in his report, impunity contributes to instability, allows war crimes and serious human rights violations to proliferate, undermines the fabric of societies and prevents the development of lasting solutions. When national authorities fail to take the steps necessary to ensure accountability, the international community should play a more proactive role in order to ensure an appropriate response, including through the establishment of ad hoc tribunals, international commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions.

Particular consideration must be given to the protection of civilians forced to leave their homes as a result of armed conflict. Azerbaijan supports the continuing efforts to raise awareness of the problem of internal displacement and the right of return.

My country's familiarity with the suffering of civilians in armed conflict is not based on hearsay. The forcible deportation of more than 200,000 Azerbaijanis from their homes in Armenia at the end of the 1980s was accompanied by killings, torture and other crimes. Even children were not spared.

The period from 1991 until the establishment of the ceasefire, in 1994, was marked by an increase in the magnitude, intensity and consistency of the attacks on Azerbaijani civilians. In February 1992, the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly was completely razed to the ground, and its civilian population was subjected to an unprecedented massacre by the invading Armenian forces. The impunity still enjoyed by the perpetrators of the crimes committed during the conflict continues to impede progress in achieving the long-awaited peace and reconciliation between the two countries.

Despite the formal ceasefire, deliberate attacks against Azerbaijani civilians and civilian objects have become more frequent and more violent in recent months. Even the calls from the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and other members of the international community to observe the Olympic Truce during the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi did not prevent the Armenian side from escalating the situation along the front line.

Azerbaijan strongly condemns all attacks against civilians. They should not pay the price for the lack of progress in the settlement process. In that context, it is important that the Security Council, Member States and regional organizations ensure that peace efforts, inter alia, contribute to ensuring accountability, including by encouraging the parties concerned to envisage transitional justice and reparation clauses in peace agreements. It is essential that such efforts and peace agreements under no circumstances encourage the acceptance of situations achieved by the unlawful use of force and other serious violations of international law, such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing.

It is essential that the Security Council consistently maintain its focus on the protection of civilians and systematically reiterate its demand that all parties to armed conflict comply fully with their obligations under international law.

In conclusion, I would like to again commend the initiative of Lithuania in convening this open debate and advancing this significant theme in the work of the Security Council.

The President: I would like to thank all delegations for their cooperation and understanding, given the very impressive list of speakers. We had close to 70 delegations make statements, but we have managed to finish perfectly on time, or at least finish the main part of our debate.

I also understand that several delegations have requested the floor to make further statements. It is my intention to accept those requests. However, I would kindly encourage each delegation to limit itself to one additional statement.

I shall now give the floor to the member of the Security Council who wishes to make a further statement.

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to exercise our right of reply following the statement made by the representative of Georgia.

We get the impression that the insinuations made against Russia by the Georgian representative in the Security Council without any context are very tiresome. We have presented our position in this regard many times, including in this Chamber. What is particularly strange about the statement by the representative of Georgia is that they were made following yesterday's news concerning the statement by the Georgian Prime Minister of his readiness to hold direct dialogue with Russia. It is time for Georgian diplomacy to open a new chapter in its history and to refrain from tiresome clichés.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mrs. Furman (Israel): The Palestinian representative's remarks earlier have no constructive purpose and only serve to inflame hostilities against Israel.

It is ironic that the Palestinian representative would lecture the world on the protection of civilians when the Palestinians are the ones using human beings as human shields. They stockpile their arsenals of weapons in the basements of homes, the playgrounds of schools and the back rooms of hospitals. In so doing, they commit a double war crime: first, by firing rockets at innocent Israeli civilians; and, secondly, by firing rockets from populated Palestinian areas and putting their own civilians at risk. A recent report by the Secretary-General reveals, that this year alone, dozens of Palestinians, including 23 children, were killed because of Palestinian-made explosives stored within civilian homes. It seems as though the Palestinian delegation is heavy on the criticism of Israel but very light on the facts.

The Palestinian representative conveniently forgot to mention the persecution and discrimination against women, religious minorities and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in Gaza and the West Bank. In Gaza, homosexuals who are not killed are subjected to 10 years in prison, and access to justice for women who are victims of domestic violence does not exist. The most recent report of the Secretary-General reveals that 24 women were killed in the name of so-called "honour" between January and August 2013. According to the report, that number is most likely underreported.

Out of respect for the Council's valuable time, I will not respond further to the baseless accusation of the Palestinian representative, except to say that it is unfortunate that she insists on politicizing this debate while peace negotiations are under way.

Allow me to thank the Egyptian representative for highlighting the issue of the protection of civilians. As the Council knows, over the past year and a half, his Government has made headlines for its treatment of civilians. As he spoke so passionately on the topic earlier today, I urge the Egyptians to go one step further and publish a volume of Egypt's best practices in the protection of civilians. I have no doubt that it will become an international best seller.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia.

Mr. Samvelian (Armenia): It was not my delegation's intention to ask to make a further statement. But having heard the unacceptable remarks of the representative of Azerbaijan, it is hard to remain silent.

It is our strong belief that there is no alternative to the peaceful resolution of any conflict. The resolution of conflicts requires political will and determination. We believe that people should be ready for peace, not war. Unfortunately, until now, the Azerbaijani leadership is doing exactly the opposite, while taking each and every opportunity to increase its warmongering and anti-Armenian hate speech on a daily basis.

Through that anti-Armenian history, Azerbaijan tries to justify the constant calls for war by its highest officials. The wounds of the last war against the civilian population of Nagorny Karabakh have not yet healed. Yet Azerbaijan is trying to launch a new war by initiating an unhealthy arms race and by preaching hatred against Armenia at the State level.

Very recently, a couple of weeks ago, the Azerbaijani President stated,

> "Present Armenia is, in fact, the historical land of Azerbaijan. Therefore, in the future we will return to our historical lands. Let young people and children know it. We must live;we live and we will live in this idea."

That militaristic rhetoric of the country's President threatens the fragile peace in our region, engages the future generation and nullifies the efforts of the ongoing peace negotiation. It should be condemned. Yet Armenia has always advocated the peaceful political resolution of the conflict through negotiation within the framework of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

That alarming act by the Azerbaijan authorities not only contradicts the humanitarian purpose of international law and the relevant international instruments but also calls into question the entire human rights system.

Since last year, Azerbaijan has been vastly increasing its military budget and acquiring more sophisticated weapons. The continuous attacks and subversive activities of the Azerbaijani forces in the area bordering Nagorny Karabakh can be seen as reconnaissance operations and a general rehearsal for war.

Such brutal and illegal actions by the Azerbaijani side have resulted in Armenian servicemen losing their lives. Several soldiers and a number of civilans were wounded in just the past few weeks.

We strongly condemn the deadly provocation by the Azerbaijani side, which poses a real threat to regional security. We expect the international community to continue its call for a prompt reaction to such atrocities, which have already undermined respect for justice, human rights and human dignity.

In his statement, the representative of Azerbaijan mentioned events in Khojaly, with the usual distortion of the facts. That came as no surprise to us. The Azerbaijani representative refers to the 1992 military event, while, according to the then Azerbaijani President, the responsibility for the slaughter of the civilian population, including children of the city of Khojaly, falls fully on the Azerbaijani Government and a political opposition group. The whole world has learned from the interview with the then Azerbaijani President that the militia of the Azerbaijani National Front actively obstructed and actually prevented the exodus of the local population through the mountain passages, specifically left open by the Karabakh Armenians to facilitate the flight of the civilian population.

The hope and intention of the Azerbaijani side was to utilize civilian losses of such magnitude in order to instigate a popular uprising against the country's President and to seize the reigns of power. We strongly advise the Azerbaijani side to conduct an internal investigation so as to reach the obvious conclusion that the Khojaly event and its inhabitants were deliberately sacrificed for political ends.

We believe that the time has come for Azerbaijan to replace hollow allegations with constructive steps aimed at creating a more conducive environment for the peaceful settlement of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Imnadze (Georgia): The Chamber has witnessed discussions about Georgia and Russia not because of insinuations about Georgia, as was said, but owing to the fact that 20 per cent of my country is still under occupation. As for the clichés, let me say that Georgia has been continuously demonstrating a constructive approach and readiness for dialogue and cooperation. Allow me to state that my Government has established a special office under the Prime Minister of Georgia for dialogue with Russia. We are constructively involved in international talks in Geneva. Georgia has unilaterally pledged not to use force. Last but not least, the recent statement by the Georgian Prime Minister on his readiness for dialogue and a meeting with the Russian leadership and his Russian counterpart was, for his part, in anticipation of the Russian President's reciprocation. We look forward to positive and constructive steps ahead and the ongoing dialogue through the international Geneva talks, and possible bilateral ones, resolving the current impasse.

Let me again stress the positive steps that Georgia has taken in our readiness to continue along that same path.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): The attempts by Armenia to disguise its aggression, and thereby to assert its innocence with regard to the crimes committed against Azerbaijani civilians, are unlikely to be taken seriously given the incontrovertible evidence, which testifies to the diametrically opposite situation.

The arguments of the Armenian side are particularly astonishing as they are voiced in the Security Council, which in 1993 adopted four resolutions. Those resolutions condemned the use of force against Azerbaijan and the occupation of its territories by the Armenian forces, reaffirmed respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the inviolability of its international borders and demanded the immediate, full and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying forces from all occupied territories (resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993)). The resolutions also made specific reference to violations of international humanitarian law, including the displacement of a large number of civilians in Azerbaijan, attacks on civilians and the bombardment of inhabited areas.

While trying to accuse Azerbaijan of alleged anti-Armenian propaganda and referring to ambiguous, politically motivated and groundless interpretations of the Khojaly massacre, the representative of Armenia at the same time not only refrained from commenting on the views expressed by the European Court of Human Rights, authoritative international non-governmental organizations and eyewitnesses of the tragedy. He also neglected to clarify the revelations of his country's high-ranking officials and the direct participants in the crime, who, in turn, unequivocally admitted their responsibility for the extermination of the inhabitants and defenders of Khojaly.

Armenia's widespread, deliberate and systematic policy of aggression and hatred is clearly reflected in the famous interview of 15 December 2000 with the then Defence Minister, now the incumbent President of Armenia. Responding to the question as to whether things could have happened differently and whether he had any regrets about the deaths of thousands of people as a result of the Armenian attacks against Azerbaijani civilians, he said frankly, "I have absolutely no regrets, since such upheavals are necessary even if thousands have to die".

No further comments are needed here to explain the logic and the attitude of the Armenian leadership towards the issue of civilian protection and the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7110

Security Council

Sixty-ninth year

Provisional

7110th meeting

Thursday, 13 February 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Murmokaitė	(Lithuania)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Rutilo
	Australia	Ms. King
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Errázuriz
	China	Mr. Zhao Yong
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Jordan	Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein
	Luxembourg	Ms. Lucas
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Sul Kyung-hoon
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Rwanda	Mr. Nduhungirehe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

The situation in Burundi

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office in Burundi (S/2014/36)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Burundi

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office in Burundi (S/2014/36)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Burundi to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2014/96, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by France and Nigeria.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2014/36, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office in Burundi.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Argentina, Australia, Chad, Chile, China, France, Jordan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Nigeria, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Rwanda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2137 (2014).

I shall now give the floor to the member of the Council who wishes to make a statement following the voting.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): First, please allow me to extend my Government's deepest condolences to the Government and the people of Burundi for the tragic loss of life and property as a result of the flooding and landslides in Bujumbura this week. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families during this difficult time.

Burundi has made consisderable progress since its years of civil conflict came to an end. The United States has been and remains one of Burundi's strongest partners, in particular as Burudi has become an exporter of peace and security through its deployment in international peacekeeping and stabilization missions.

While acknowledging that significant progress in peace, stability and development, the current political stalemate and heightened tensions point to a continuing need for the United Nations Office in Burundi (BNUB) to maintain a presence to continue to help consoldiate peace, democracy and national reconciliation. Last year's media law, the recent dismissal of the First Vice-President and the constitutional amendments proposed threaten the delicate power-sharing arrangements that have enabled Burundi's progres since the Arusha accords were signed, in 2000.

The United States strongly supports BNUB's mandates and the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General as crucial to Burundi's continued progress in fully establishing democratic governance and ensuring stability. The Government's continued partnerships with the United Nations mission and the Special Representative, as well as the internationl community more broadly, will be increasingly important in the lead-up to the 2015 elections, when inclusive political dialogue and compromise will be required of all political leaders and parties.

We welcome the Burundian Government's call for a United Nations presence through the entirety of the electoral process. We see this mission as playing an important good-offices role as a confidence-building and diplomatic incentive and look forward to its independent assessment of the overall political and technical conduct of the elections. We urge the Government not to attempt to go it alone through this crucial and sensitive electoral period, but to welcome the partnership and support of the international community through this United Nations presence. We look forward to the Secretary-General's regular reporting to the Council in that regard, including on the agreed-upon benchmarks.

The United States looks forward to continuing to work with the Government and the people of Burundi as a partner in the country's peace, stability and development.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Burundi.

Mr. Niyonzima (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to address the Security Council on behalf of the Government of Burundi, as well as on my own behalf, on the occasion of the adoption of resolution 2137 (2014), on the United Nations Office in Burundi (BNUB), which determines the future of our cooperation with the United Nations. The peace dividend that Burundians are now enjoying is the result of joint efforts of Burundians and the international community.

Here in the Chamber on 28 January (see S/PV.7104), the Government of Burundi called on the international community to take into account the significant progress made by our country in many areas. We also expressed the desire to move on to a new framework of cooperation with the United Nations, with BNUB gradually yielding to a United Nations country team in Burundi.

I want to thank all the members of the Security Council for preparing the resolution while taking into account the concerns of Burundians, national ownership and sovereignty. My gratitude goes in particular to France for its facilitation efforts, which led to the satisfaction of all. My deep gratitude is proportionate to the difficulties its Ambassador had to overcome.

Some delegations were initially reluctant to support the position of the Government of Burundi, citing certain problems related to the domestic political situation. I understand their concerns and I sincerely thank them. I know they certainly want the best for my country. However, I would like to reassure the Council that Burundians have been chastened by years of fratricidal politico-ethnic conflicts, and have finally decided to bury the hatchet when it comes to war.

The apparent differences between Burundi's political actors and civil society should not be of great concern to the members of the Council — they are often merely part of the political posturing associated with learning about democracy. It is also a good thing that political parties, private media, trade unions and non-governmental organizations are free to express themselves. The State intervenes only rarely, in instances of extreme contempt and to ensure public order.

The decision to close BNUB at the end of this year will mark the beginning of a new form of collaboration with the Government of Burundi as well as the end of a successful mission.

Issues related to human rights, the protection of civilians, transitional justice, the electoral process and, above all, development are concerns that we take to heart.

I conclude my remarks by thanking the Council again for this resolution. I also wish to inform members that Burundi takes note of the recommendations of the Security Council.

We reiterate our commitment to continue moving forward to consolidate peace, as well as to cooperate with the United Nations and other partners to merit the multifaceted support from which we have heretofore benefited from the international community. That support will continue to help us as we strive for growth and seek to combat poverty.

Through the Council, I would like to take this opportunity to inform the international community of the disaster that struck my country last Sunday, 9 February. Torrential rains have destroyed infrastructure and left more than 60 dead, most of them children. The Government calls for international solidarity to help cope with that humanitarian crisis.

The President: The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.